Defending a Paradigm by Patrolling a Boundary: Two Global Newspapers' Approach to WikiLeaks

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Abstract

Drawing on the concepts of paradigm repair and professional boundary work, this study examined the way the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* portrayed the whistle-blowing group WikiLeaks as being beyond the bounds of professional journalism. Through a textual analysis of *Times* and *Guardian* content about WikiLeaks during 2010 and early 2011, the study found that the *Times* depicted WikiLeaks as outside journalism's professional norms regarding institutionality, source-based reporting routines, and objectivity, while the *Guardian* did so only with institutionality. That value thus emerged as a supranational journalistic norm, while source-based reporting routines and objectivity were bound within national contexts.

Keywords

On July 25, 2010, the transparency activist group WikiLeaks made public one of the largest intelligence leaks in American military history, releasing about 75,000 pages of internal U.S. military documents from the war in Afghanistan. In an unprecedented arrangement, three news organizations—the *New York Times* of the United States, Britain's *Guardian*, and Germany's *Der Spiegel*—were given a few weeks to peruse the documents, add context with their own reporting, and publish their reports as a shared exclusive to coincide with WikiLeaks' public release.[1]

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For the *Times*, the "war log" report led off the front page on a Sunday, and formed the centerpiece of a stylized multimedia package online.[2] But when addressing WikiLeaks over the following six months, *Times* executive editor Bill Keller belittled it and took pains to separate the *Times* from it, rather than praising the organization that gave his newspaper arguably its biggest scoop in 2010. He chastised the group for its "glib antipathy toward the United States,"[3] characterized its leader, Julian Assange, as "arrogant, thin-skinned, conspiratorial and oddly credulous,"[4] and repeatedly emphasized the *Times*' independence from WikiLeaks.[5]

This might seem like an oddly belligerent way for a news editor to talk about an important source or collaborator, particularly in public. But Keller's comments were not simply the product of eccentricity or personal distaste. Instead, they were part of an effort to marginalize WikiLeaks to bolster the *Times*' own status as an elite standard-bearer of modern journalism. This aim was likely not a conscious, explicit one for Keller, but it was illustrative of a larger coolness toward WikiLeaks among the *Times* and other traditional media organizations during late 2010 and early 2011 as WikiLeaks ascended to public prominence through a series of increasingly disruptive intelligence leaks.

The connection between these two sides of those organizations' discourse—the politics of self-justification and the ostracism of WikiLeaks—is what this article explores. For example, why did the *New York Times* feel the need to distance itself from WikiLeaks to preserve its own authority, even as it relied on the group for information? How did its response compare to that of the *Guardian*, a British newspaper in a similar situation? And what does that tell us about the way the traditional news media conceive of themselves as a profession?

Through a comparative textual analysis of the *New York Times*' and the *Guardian*'s discourse regarding WikiLeaks, this study found that the *Times* portrayed WikiLeaks as journalistically deviant to defend its profession's institutionality, source-based reporting routines, and objectivity against what it perceived as breaches of its paradigmatic boundaries. The *Guardian*, on the other hand, largely did not consider WikiLeaks' lack of relationship with official sources or its advocacy-based approach threatening to its professional norms, though it also emphasized WikiLeaks' noninstitutional characteristics as a way to separate the group from its profession. In the process, institutionality emerged as a key professional journalistic value across the two papers' national contexts, while source-based reporting routines and objectivity were largely bound within those contexts.

These newspapers' responses to WikiLeaks are a particularly illustrative pair of cases to study in determining how traditional journalism institutions are reacting to a new set of quasi-journalistic actors because WikiLeaks, as Benkler argued,[6] stands at the forefront of an emerging iteration of the Fourth Estate marked by increased advocacy, networked collaboration, and aggregation as a means of processing information. WikiLeaks shares many of these characteristics with the political blogosphere,[7] but it goes further, setting the prototype for the geographically diffuse "stateless news organization"[8] and creating a potential model for gathering and disseminating news in the networked information age. The *Times* and—to a lesser extent—the *Guardian*, on the

other hand, have long been regarded as particularly influential news organizations whose news values and ideology often typify those of the rest of the professional news media in their respective nations.[9] While these two papers' distinctive cultural location and relationship with WikiLeaks should lead us to take caution in generalizing their discourse to the larger American and British professional media, they also make these cases a valuable glimpse into global traditional news organizations' encounter with this new networked journalistic phenomenon, one that may be prototypical for such interactions between the two spheres in the future.

Paradigm Repair and Boundary Maintenance

The theoretical tools needed to answer the questions posed above are aptly provided by the concepts of paradigm repair and boundary maintenance. Paradigm repair holds that certain groups develop a shared set of values that they use to create and organize knowledge, and also to define themselves and maintain their own authority. Those groups often respond to cases that challenge their values by portraying the actors involved in the case as anomalous, to distance themselves from the case and preserve their own collective authority.

In relation to journalism, several studies have examined the ways in which news organizations have distanced themselves from actors who violate aspects of their paradigm as a way to fortify those paradigmatic elements, including objectivity,[10] their authority as gatekeepers,[11] or their difference from the paradigm of news as entertainment.[12] While these studies have examined cases involving actors within professional journalism, such as a TV news crew filming a man setting himself on fire,[13] a socialist reporting for the *Wall Street Journal*,[14] and a *New York Times* reporter fabricating stories,[15] the concept of paradigm repair has typically been applied not as much to the difficult-to-classify actors themselves as to the direct criticism from outside the profession as a result of those paradigmatically ambiguous cases.

The research on paradigm repair stems from Kuhn's concept of paradigms, which he defined in part as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on, shared by the members of a given community."[16] This paradigm serves as the group's guiding principles in organizing and presenting information. Though they are occasionally expressed in explicit forms, such as professional codes, they are often unspoken, and often lack even an agreed-on rationalization.[17] Because of this taken-for-granted status, paradigms can function (often in tandem with professionalization) to limit their communities' range of inquiry, closing off issues and alternative approaches that are not compatible with their form.[18]

Paradigms are periodically confronted with anomalies—cases that share some characteristics of the larger paradigm but diverge in ways that challenge the paradigm itself, leaving the group with the option of either adjusting the paradigm to fit the case or casting it as entirely outside the paradigm to restore faith in the paradigm from both within and outside the group. Groups typically choose the latter,[19] and the way they attempt this "repair work"[20] can reveal much about the nature of the paradigm.

In addition to paradigm repair, this study draws on boundary maintenance, a similar theoretical concept rooted in Gieryn's idea of "boundary-work,"[21] or a field's attribution of certain characteristics to itself to create a social boundary between it and adjacent fields, typically as an attempt to assert the field's autonomy and enlarge the field's material and social resources.[22] These boundaries are often indistinct or moving,[23] so they can become sites for what Abbott calls "jurisdictional disputes" between neighboring professions.[24] Within professional journalism, blogs and "tabloid" or entertainment news have been seen as neighboring professions,[25] and this definitional rhetoric is commonly exercised by insiders through public self-criticism, using dichotomous distinctions such as professional/amateur, responsible/irresponsible, and ethical/unethical.[26]

Though the concepts of paradigm repair and boundary maintenance have rarely been linked by researchers, they can complement each other well in this case. While both concepts are readily applied to instances of direct criticism of journalistic institutions and ideologies, boundary maintenance has been more relevant to the less-explicit challenges to the authority of the journalistic field, such as the blogosphere's emergence as news sources,[27] and in this case, the implicit challenge of WikiLeaks' networked journalism to professional journalism's more institutional form. They can also function together—boundary maintenance distancing the threatening actor and paradigm repair parrying the criticism received as a result of the breach—with both concepts serving the same purpose: justifying and reinforcing norms of the journalistic profession in the face of perceived threats.

Journalism's Professional Paradigm

To examine the ways in which WikiLeaks presented a challenge to the dominant journalistic paradigm and the means by which journalists defended their professional authority, an outline of the paradigm being challenged must first be drawn. This study will examine three particular dimensions of the professional journalistic paradigm that were violated by WikiLeaks: institutionality, source-based reporting routines, and objectivity. While many of the central aspects of these values are shared by both the British and American press, key differences exist.

Institutionality

Journalism exhibits many of the characteristics of a profession guided by paradigms, becoming increasingly professionalized in recent decades, with a reliance on reporting routines and a consensus on news values and appropriate professional ethical norms.[28] As researchers have noted,[29] these values have been held at a level that extends across organizations to form its own institution, which we will define here as a deeply embedded organization or pattern of behavior that helps constitute social structure.[30] Journalists themselves have also often conceived of themselves as an institution, exhibiting a professional identity that draws on common ethical values and social

roles.[31] Among the most prominent sites for the transmission of these institutional values, whether explicit or implicit, has been within the news organization,[32] giving the organization a central role in developing journalists' institutional framework. Much of the research into journalism's institutional and organizational qualities has centered on American journalism, though the same characteristics have also been noted in the British professional news media.[33] Journalists have repeatedly evidenced this organizational orientation within their institutional values in their discourse about new media, portraying bloggers and online journalists in antiorganizational terms, as individualists unaccountable for their views inhabiting an unchecked online space.[34]

Source-Based Reporting Routines

One of the primary ways in which these institutional values are translated to individual-level action is through the everyday routines that journalists use to gather information and classify stories.[35] These routines help standardize the news, while also communicating ideology by providing the gloss of a professional and systematic process that helps support journalists' cultural and epistemological authority,[36] and by serving as the "cultural glue" that helps hold together mainstream journalists' common paradigm and interpretive framework.[37]

Perhaps the most elemental of these routines is the relationship between journalists and their sources. As Schudson described it, "the story of journalism, on a day-to-day basis, is the story of interaction of reporters and officials."[38] Though this relationship inevitably contains some tension, it is primarily marked by mutual dependence between the two groups, as each side offers exclusive access to resources that the other values—officials need publicity and influence, and reporters need a steady supply of "newsworthy" information.[39] This symbiotic relationship produces and depends on what Blumler and Gurevitch called a "shared culture"—a set of common social values and role definitions, as if reporters and officials are "playing a game with more or less agreed-upon rules."[40] This element is particularly significant because it opens up journalism's institutional ideology to be so fundamentally shaped by a group outside of the institution (official sources, typically within government and business) that individuals cannot fully share in the ideology while rejecting a relationship with this outside group. Elements of this symbiotic shared culture have been found in both British and American journalism, though the British relationship between journalists and government officials is generally characterized with more conflict and tension.[41]

Objectivity

The notion of objectivity is one of the largest points of difference between the American and British journalistic paradigms. It has been described as the "chief occupational value of American journalism."[42] Within that paradigm, the idea of objectivity holds that reporting should consist only of facts, unadorned by opinion or bias, and where facts cannot be obtained, truth can be most nearly discerned by portraying

conflicting claims with equal weight.[43] Within this concept, journalists' role is to serve as neutral transmitters of this opinion-free—or at least opinion-balanced—social reality, reflecting an assumption that this reality rests on knowable facts that can be conveyed by journalists.[44] As some journalists have acknowledged, this type of neutral transmission of objective reality is impossible. News media unavoidably represent events "in ways which are not pregiven in the events themselves," whether by prioritizing or deprioritizing actors and events, making reporting decisions based on culturally bound values, or being bound by language that cannot accurately transmit reality.[45] In actuality, then, objectivity in the American sense is a "strategic ritual,"[46] a routinized reporting form meant to shield journalists from accusations of bias to maintain their cultural authority. This allows journalists who portray those who do not practice this ritual as unreliable shills for political parties or special interests.[47]

This norm has been found to be essentially American. Schudson traced its rise within an exclusively American context,[48] and when surveyed, British journalists have expressed an approach to the issue that places them within the same paradigm as their fellow Western Europeans, rather than Americans.[49] This European approach places more of an emphasis on interpretive facets of journalism and understands objectivity as a practice of promoting skepticism regarding the political and cultural establishment.[50] It is this interpretive paradigm from which the *Guardian* operates, as it aims to become "the world's leading liberal voice."[51]

WikiLeaks as Anomalous Case

WikiLeaks is an internationally based nonprofit website dedicated to leaking sensitive documents. It was founded in 2006 by Julian Assange, an Australian former hacker, and consists of a loose conglomerate of global activists without a stable organizational structure or formal headquarters. The site was originally intended to function as a wiki, allowing a large, distributed group of users to collaboratively upload, review, and disseminate leaked documents, though that model was scrapped in favor of releasing documents to journalists and publicly releasing them in conjunction with those journalists' published reports.[52]

After leaking documents on a range of global issues for four years, WikiLeaks burst onto the international scene in 2010 with four major leaks, beginning with the April 2010 release of video of U.S. soldiers killing Iraqi civilians (including two Reuters journalists), WikiLeaks' first significant attempt to reach out to traditional news organizations.[53] In July 2010, WikiLeaks released the aforementioned classified documents from the war in Afghanistan, actively working with news organizations for the first time to pore through the documents. WikiLeaks followed that release in October 2010 with a similar leak of field reports from the war in Iraq, again prereleasing them to the *Times* and seven international news organizations.[54] In November 2010, WikiLeaks released about 250,000 diplomatic cables to the *Guardian, Der Spiegel*, the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and Spain's *El País*, but excluding the *Times*, which received the information from the *Guardian*.[55] The site initially published only a small

selection of the cables and gradually released others before all the cables were inadvertently released in summer 2011.[56]

WikiLeaks violates each of the elements of the professional journalistic paradigm discussed earlier. It defies institutional characterization with its fluidity, both geographically and organizationally; it has no physical headquarters, and its founder, Assange, spent most of 2010 without a permanent residence as he sought to evade arrest and expedition for Swedish sexual assault charges.[57] Neither its membership nor organizational structure has an established form, being constituted instead by a loose, internationally diffused, and continually changing collection of activists and collaborators. In addition, WikiLeaks engages in few, if any, of the reporting routines that traditional journalists use to define themselves. It has essentially no relationship with the official sources with which mainstream journalists share a culture. Instead, U.S. government officials have repeatedly condemned its actions, with the Obama administration criticizing its lack of redaction of documents and contemplating prosecution,[58] and other officials, including Vice President Joe Biden, calling its members "terrorists."[59] (The person believed to have been the source of WikiLeaks' major leaks was not a well-placed government source, but a low-level Army private.) And, contrary to the norm of objectivity, WikiLeaks and Assange have expressed explicit political goals through their leaks, including government transparency and the exposure of wrongdoing by the U.S. government and major corporations.[60]

Yet despite this deviance from the professional journalistic paradigm, WikiLeaks' core activities—gaining access to closely guarded information about important issues in the public interest, then publishing it—have traditionally been thought of as journalistic in nature.[61] This presents traditional journalists with a potentially problematic anomaly, one that performs what they have long perceived as a core duty of their profession, but one that also flouts several important aspects of their professional paradigm in the process.

Method

This study examined the way in which two traditional news organizations, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, talked publicly about that paradigmatic anomaly. To do so, a textual analysis of the *Times*' and the *Guardian*'s discourse about WikiLeaks was conducted, focusing on the time period between WikiLeaks' first major document leak (July 25, 2010) and the most recent (April 24, 2011) major document leak (as of December 2011) in which it collaborated with traditional news organizations. The *Times* and *Guardian* were chosen because they were the only traditional news organizations in their respective countries to work directly with WikiLeaks on its 2010 document leaks. Also, as leading national newspapers, both organizations made for similar cases from which to compare similarities and differences in paradigm repair in American and European contexts.

A sample for this analysis was gathered by searching the *Times*' and *Guardian*'s websites for mentions of WikiLeaks or Assange using both the papers' website search

and the Google News Archive, and results were filtered to include only those with substantive discussion of Assange or WikiLeaks themselves, as opposed to the content of their leaks. At the *Times*, this method yielded a sample of 132 articles, columns, and blog posts, plus 16 others from before the publication of WikiLeaks' Afghanistan leak in July 2010. At the *Guardian*, where coverage was far heavier, 503 pieces of content were gathered, plus 55 others from before July 2010. Though all the texts in both samples were viewed, a subset of about 100 pieces was examined particularly closely and analyzed thematically. This subset consisted largely of opinion columns, editorials, and blog posts, as well as news articles deemed to be major vehicles for paradigm repair. While the newspapers produce other forms of discourse, including employees' Twitter accounts and executives' comments in other official channels, examining all of the material published under the *Times*' and *Guardian*'s auspices is sufficient to provide a general understanding of the organizations' discourse. This type of analysis cannot reveal the internal disputes that surely occurred at the two newspapers regarding WikiLeaks and how it should be characterized, though some conflicting texts hint at some disagreement.

The purpose of this research is not to evaluate the veracity of the *Times*' and *Guardian*'s characterizations of WikiLeaks; it is instead to examine the nature of the discourse itself. WikiLeaks has indeed exhibited behavior that could be characterized as eccentric or erratic, including infighting among members and suspicion of its collaborators.[62] However, this does not preclude the existence of paradigm repair and boundary maintenance in news organizations' description of it. This behavior is just one of many aspects for news organizations to emphasize when covering WikiLeaks, and there are a number of possible interpretations for them to take from it. This study examines the emphases and interpretations of these organizations in particular.

Results

Institutionality

The *Times* responded to WikiLeaks' nontraditional, diffused organizational structure by repeatedly characterizing WikiLeaks as an unstable group that essentially consisted solely of an erratic, egomaniacal figure who should not be taken seriously. This depiction was more muted at the *Guardian*, though elements of it arose at times. At both papers, this picture of WikiLeaks did not begin in earnest until after the group worked with the *Times* and the *Guardian* on the Afghanistan leak in July; in fact, the *Times*' first mention of WikiLeaks portrayed it as an asset for the organization's watchdog role: "By being everywhere, yet in no exact place, Wikileaks is, in effect, beyond the reach of any institution or government that hopes to silence it."[63] The *Guardian* was full of similar positively tinged portrayals, even after July 2010, including a description of the group as "brilliantly constructed" to avoid government reprisal.[64]

As soon as both newspapers published their reports on the Afghanistan war logs, *Times* editor Keller began publicly distancing the paper from WikiLeaks while simultaneously defending its own decision to report on the leak. In an online question-and-answer session with readers about the story, Keller emphasized the *Times*' lack of control over WikiLeaks' behavior: "To say that it is an independent organization is a monumental understatement. The decision to post this secret military archive on a Web site accessible to the public was WikiLeaks', not ours."[65] Keller reasserted this distancing rhetoric several times in similar terms over the next six months, describing WikiLeaks and Assange in unequivocal terms as a "source of raw material,"[66] and not as a partner, collaborator, or journalist.[67] *Guardian* investigations editor David Leigh, who worked closely with WikiLeaks, performed similar distancing soon after the Afghanistan leaks' publication, stating in a *Guardian* podcast that Assange was a hacker rather than a journalist, and that the paper used him as a source.[68]

Keller and Leigh never explicitly stated why they viewed WikiLeaks as being outside the parameters of journalism, but a source quoted approvingly in a *Times* column hinted at the paradigm violation by comparing the group unfavorably to the Associated Press, one of modern journalism's oldest, largest, and most respected institutions.[69] Throughout its coverage, the *Times* portrayed WikiLeaks as precisely the opposite: unestablished, small, and flimsy. *Times* articles rarely mentioned other members of the group, consistently conflating the organization with Assange individually and making it easier for Keller and the *Times* to treat it (or him) as a lone source, rather than a journalistic collaborator. When other WikiLeaks members did appear, it was often in the context of intraorganizational conflict, such as in one article about the defection of a member in which Assange was referred to not as a bona fide leader, but as WikiLeaks' "figurehead."[70] An October 2010 feature on Assange was most direct in this emphasis. Its central premise was that Assange was increasingly being abandoned by his collaborators because of his egomaniacal behavior. As a result, the article stated, Assange was performing almost every duty in the group unilaterally, leaving WikiLeaks with an "apparent lack of accountability to anybody but himself."[71]

WikiLeaks was thus reduced in the pages of the *Times* from an institution to a single person. Stripping WikiLeaks' institutional cachet allowed the *Times* to more easily dismiss the group's journalistic credibility, and virtually every description of Assange aided in that dismissal: he was variously described as "dictatorial, eccentric and capricious"; "elusive, manipulative and volatile"; "secretive, shadowy"; "nomadic"; and "a loose cannon."[72] Stories also highlighted what Keller called Assange's "outlaw celebrity," painting a picture of a man who was more interested in cultivating a myth around himself than being the leader of a serious news organization.[73] The *Guardian*, on the other hand, reacted against this depiction of Assange, even as it occasionally used language similar to the *Times* in describing him. One *Guardian* editorial lamented that the WikiLeaks story was being reduced to an Assange biopic, calling it "limiting, and highly diversionary."[74] After the *Guardian* stopped working with WikiLeaks in early 2011, however, the paper's attitude toward WikiLeaks' lack of institutionality soured.

At one point, Leigh criticized Assange for making a virtue out of "a nomadic, virtually stateless, existence that circumvented traditional systems of justice."[75]

All of the *Times*' descriptions—and, to a lesser extent, the *Guardian*'s—combined to present an image of a group that lacked the seriousness, stability, and accountability that comes with being a proper news organization. The effect of repair work was particularly evident when two people from outside the *Times* urged WikiLeaks to take on these characteristics if it wanted to be taken seriously as part of the journalistic community. In one online column, a professor advised WikiLeaks to "professionalize and depersonalize itself as much as possible,"[76] and as quoted in another, a former journalist warned that "they are going to have to evolve into an organization that has an address and identity or the clock will run out on that level of collaboration."[77] The paradigm repair and boundary maintenance were complete: WikiLeaks had been placed outside the boundaries of professional journalism and needed to institutionalize itself to gain entry.

Source-Based Reporting Routines

This area marked the most significant divergence between the *Times*' and the *Guardian*'s discourse. The *Times* reasserted its own source-based professional journalistic status by repeatedly emphasizing WikiLeaks' lack of relationship with the U.S. government, in contrast to its own cooperation with government sources. The *Guardian*, meanwhile, observed the U.S. government's denouncements of WikiLeaks with skeptical detachment, portraying government officials, rather than WikiLeaks, as deviant.

WikiLeaks' relationship with governments was rarely addressed by the *Guardian* substantively before the July 2010 Afghanistan leak, but in this area, too, the *Times* framed WikiLeaks' antagonism toward governments as an asset before WikiLeaks emerged as a threat to its journalistic paradigm. In a March 2010 article on a Pentagon report that warned of WikiLeaks' potential danger, the *Times* called WikiLeaks "online muckrakers" and noted that it had been honored by Amnesty International, while corporate and government efforts to retaliate against WikiLeaks were portrayed as irrational.[78]

After the publication of the Afghanistan war documents, however, the *Times* began airing the U.S. government's complaints about a lack of communication with WikiLeaks without challenging them, reporting that WikiLeaks would not answer government phone calls and that the Pentagon's attempts at "asking WikiLeaks respectfully" for its cooperation would likely be ignored.[79] The *Times* occasionally contrasted these complaints with the government's commendation of its own behavior,[80] and several times, the *Times* portrayed itself as an intermediary between official sources and WikiLeaks, describing the way the Obama administration had thanked it for its handling of the situation and had asked it to pass on requests to WikiLeaks.[81] (The *Guardian* noted that it did not play this intermediary role, though it did urge WikiLeaks to redact sensitive names.[82]) In this way, the *Times* pushed WikiLeaks

outside its professional boundaries and defended its own paradigm, juxtaposing its own socially approved interactions with official sources with WikiLeaks' socially condemned distance from those sources. The *Times*' shift in tone toward WikiLeaks occurred just as WikiLeaks began coming under more vocal criticism from the U.S. government. As it became clearer that the official sources on whom the *Times* depended deemed WikiLeaks' behavior unacceptable, the *Times* steadily began to distance itself from its collaborator rather than its sources.

The *Times* did, however, acknowledge a certain degree of conflict in its relationship with U.S. government sources. Keller and one *Times* reporter, for example, described the paper's meetings with administration officials as "tense," with "an undertone of suppressed outrage and frustration."[83] But when Keller did write about tension in his paper's relationship with government sources, he couched the conflict in statements about the *Times*' respect for the government's requests and about the routine nature of the relationship. He referred to the *Times*' meetings with government officials as being daily and businesslike, and said, "We listen to the government's case for secrecy with great respect, but we do not always agree."[84] The message was clear: the *Times*, unlike WikiLeaks, handles its conflict with government officials in an acceptable way, within appropriate, established journalistic roles.

The *Times* defended its symbiotic relationship with government officials most explicitly in three opinion pieces emphasizing the paper's fundamental support for the government's claims to authority. In one text, Keller defended the *Times*' handling of the leaked documents by describing the paper's "large and personal stake in the country's security" (unlike, apparently, WikiLeaks).[85] Conservative columnist David Brooks referred to the *Times*' professional obligation to filter leaked information according to what would best preserve "world order" maintained by diplomats and soldiers—a value he asserted that Assange did not share.[86] And the *New Yorker*'s George Packer was quoted approvingly by *Times* media columnist David Carr equating journalism with upholding the authority of democratic governmental institutions, saying of WikiLeaks, "They simply believe that the State Department is an illegitimate organization that needs to be exposed, which is not really journalism."[87] Journalism, the way the *Times* defined and defended its paradigm in this case, must include a fundamentally supportive relationship between journalists and officials, something WikiLeaks does not have.

By contrast, this rhetoric was almost entirely missing from the *Guardian*'s discourse about WikiLeaks and government officials. In its place, the *Guardian* adopted the posture of horrified onlookers, characterizing American officials' response to WikiLeaks as "hysterical," "savage," "deranged," and "bloodcurdling."[88] Several *Guardian* opinion pieces and blogs described WikiLeaks' conflict with government as being largely or even wholly between the group and the United States,[89] and the paper's editor-in-chief, Alan Rusbridger, later described himself as a distant observer in London, astonished at the violent rhetoric toward WikiLeaks coming from Washington.[90] The *Guardian* may have had source-based reporting routines to defend in other cases, but it was not threatened on that front by WikiLeaks, as the paper

portrayed itself as being without a significant relationship with the U.S. government to protect. The primary officials with whom it did have a relationship that was crucial to its reporting routines—British government officials—were far more muted in their reaction,[91] thus leaving this area of the *Guardian*'s paradigm safely undisturbed, unlike the *Times*'.

Objectivity

Similarly, the *Guardian*'s journalistic paradigm was not threatened by WikiLeaks' mixture of journalism and advocacy, while the *Times* described WikiLeaks' Assange as a political extremist who could be taken seriously in a journalistic context only when he gave up his advocacy. Even before WikiLeaks presented a serious challenge to its journalistic paradigm, the *Times*—much more so than the *Guardian*—was concerned with whether it would fall under the category of journalism or advocacy. An April 2010 *Times* article reported that Assange considered himself both a journalist and an advocate, but would define himself as an advocate if forced to choose between the two.[92] The *Times* thus began placing him outside the realm of journalistic objectivity, though at that point it seemed comfortable with ambiguity, saying in the article that WikiLeaks was moving closer to both investigative journalism and advocacy.

After the Afghanistan leak, Assange's political beliefs were often cited as a strike against his journalistic credibility, typically in opinion columns or in statements attributed to government officials or "detractors." In their opinion pieces, *Times* columnists called Assange "an old-fashioned anarchist" and "a self-styled foe of the United States," with the latter description followed by the statement, "The guy makes me queasy."[93] Once again, Keller delivered the harshest criticism, calling Assange "a man who clearly had his own agenda" and who was "openly contemptuous of the American government," and he referred to WikiLeaks' Collateral Murder video as "antiwar propaganda."[94]

The *Guardian*, too, regularly labeled WikiLeaks as a group of activists and Assange as a hacker, though unlike at the *Times*, those terms were not surrounded by pejorative descriptions of the group's purposes; they were simply explanatory descriptors and not presented as being at odds with journalism.[95] Rare exceptions to this pattern did exist, including David Leigh's description of Assange as a hacker, and journalist and freelance writer Theo Brainin's column characterizing Assange as "an opponent of US foreign policy, who seeks to obstruct it, no matter the cost."[96] For the most part, however, the *Guardian* spent little space on the relationship between WikiLeaks' advocacy and its journalistic activity; as a publication with an openly liberal approach to its reporting and commentary, the paper viewed WikiLeaks' advocacy with understanding, rather than suspicion.

Times writers did acknowledge that WikiLeaks was engaging in journalistic behavior, but they did so with an insistence that it was moving toward the journalistic paradigm precisely because it was toning down its advocacy.[97] One news article posited that WikiLeaks was being taken seriously by news organizations because, unlike with the Collateral Murder video, it was now "handing over the documents to professionals,

with no strings attached, and before the site itself could offer its own interpretation."[98] WikiLeaks' path to inclusion within journalism's professional boundaries was laid out: the more it shed its political expression and conformed to the paradigm of objectivity, the more it could be considered proper journalism. Just as in the area of institutionalization, WikiLeaks had been placed outside journalism's professional boundaries, with instructions to adopt its objectivity-based paradigm if it wanted to come back in. In the *Times*' case in particular, each of these three characterizations of WikiLeaks— as uninstitutional, disconnected from official sources, and subjective—worked in concert (at times overlapping) to distance WikiLeaks from the organization's standing within professional journalism.

Conclusion

WikiLeaks is an anomalous organization that presented a particularly difficult problem for the *New York Times*, violating several important aspects of the professional journalistic paradigm and angering both government officials and many of the *Times*' readers and critics by doing so. But it was also a collaborator with the *Times*, one that worked with its reporters for several weeks on a major document leak and whose actions allowed the *Times* privileged access to one of the year's biggest news stories. To directly charge WikiLeaks with unethical or unacceptable behavior, then, could have risked implicating the *Times* itself by association.

The *Times*' rhetoric was consequently quite careful, as it found particular paradigmatic issues to use as wedges to push WikiLeaks outside journalism's professional boundaries while reaffirming its own place inside those boundaries, as an established, trusted institution worthy of the social authority to monitor other important institutions. Through this paradoxical treatment, the *Times* could mine WikiLeaks for the assets it found useful (particularly privileged access to valuable information), then toss it aside as it became a threat to the *Times*' professional self-conception. Boundary maintenance and paradigm repair played distinct but complementary roles in this process. Boundary maintenance allowed the *Times* to position itself as distant from an organization even as it collaborated with that group. Once WikiLeaks had been placed outside journalism's professional boundaries, paradigm repair functioned to bolster and reaffirm the *Times*' own ideological position in response to the criticism generated because of WikiLeaks' alternative approach.

The *Guardian* was in a different position. Like the *Times*, it was a close collaborator with WikiLeaks; but unlike the *Times*, its journalistic paradigm was not particularly challenged, resulting in little need for repairing it and pushing WikiLeaks outside of its professional boundaries. The American sense of journalistic objectivity that WikiLeaks violated—obtaining truth by presenting conflicting claims with equal weight—is not a fundamental part of the *Guardian*'s paradigm, and its source-based reporting routines were not threatened in this particular case. Institutionality did emerge as an important area of repair, especially after the *Guardian* cut ties with WikiLeaks in early 2011. While the *Guardian* was more amenable toward WikiLeaks

than the *Times*, it too began to guard its occupational territory as WikiLeaks' skepticism of institutions (of which the *Guardian* was one) became more apparent. As that skepticism damaged the two organizations' relationship and cut off the *Guardian* from the assets WikiLeaks offered, the paper's efforts to repair the threatened area of its paradigm intensified, using the same complementary process with boundary maintenance and paradigm repair as the *Times*.

Despite their disparate structures, WikiLeaks, the *Times*, and the *Guardian* all inhabit overlapping discursive space as journalistic organizations with global ambitions and reach. While the *Times*' and *Guardian*'s global orientations arise from within a traditional institutional structure and particular national location, WikiLeaks' approach is more organizationally diffuse and more thoroughly supranational. Within this global journalistic context, this comparative study suggests that some values within the professional journalistic paradigm remained more confined to national contexts—in this case, objectivity and source-based reporting routines—while institutionality emerged as a paradigmatic aspect that transcended local and national systems.

The *Times* and the *Guardian* are certainly far from the only news organizations performing this delicate balancing act, and future research including other American and European news organizations would be helpful in giving a more complete picture of the paradigm repair being practiced. But through these exploratory cases, the paradigmatic picture of what two prominent news organizations consider themselves to be—and not to be—comes into sharper focus. As more news organizations follow in WikiLeaks' model, straddling the lines between traditional journalistic functions and a more open approach, this paradigmatic self-definition will become an increasingly important marker of professional journalism's future course. Either the traditional journalistic paradigm will shift and open itself up to new models for journalism practice, or it will remain rigid and thus cut off a wide range of innovative, vibrant, quasi-journalistic actors from its purview.

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Notes

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