Public journalism
A reply to critics

■ **Tanni Haas**
Brooklyn College, USA

■ **Linda Steiner**
Rutgers University, USA

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes and responds to the most significant criticisms of public journalism made by scholars. After discussing public journalism advocates' alleged failure to define public journalism clearly, we examine more specific criticisms. Among other issues, few advocates have taken seriously the likely impact of commercial imperatives on public journalism's modes of operation. We argue, however, that public journalism projects show that reform-oriented news organizations can challenge long-standing journalistic conventions, despite managements' interests in maximizing profit. Ultimately, we argue, public journalism's long-term viability depends on continuing, explicit commitment by journalists, its institutionalization within newsrooms and journalism classrooms, and continued theory-development, research, and assessment.

KEY WORDS ▪ citizen participation ▪ civic journalism ▪ journalism theory ▪ public sphere

The public journalism movement is a controversial, if not divisive, topic among journalism scholars and practicing journalists. It emerged in the early 1990s in response to two widening gaps of 'crisis' proportions: between government and citizens, and between news organizations and their audiences. That is, declines in voter participation in political elections and, more generally, in civic participation in local community affairs, were often cited as evidence of widespread withdrawal by citizens from democratic processes. Similarly, scholars and journalists, having often criticized news organizations' horse-race approach to political campaigns, interpreted the public's apparent disinterest in voting as proving widespread public disaffection with mass-mediated political discourse. In response, many news organizations began to experiment with ways to enhance civic commitment and participation in

democratic processes and to rethink their relationships to their audiences. Instead of conceiving of themselves as providing information to 'consumers', some news organizations tried out various ways to catalyze conversation among 'citizens'.

Although the public's suspicions about news organizations *and* government seems widely conceded, whether journalists can or even should try to reverse that disjuncture remains a matter of considerable debate. Since its emergence, public journalism has been the subject of highly conflicting assessments. Without wholly endorsing it, one prominent sociologist-historian calls public journalism 'the most impressive critique of journalistic practice inside journalism in a generation' (Schudson, 1999: 118). On the other hand, many scholars worry that public journalism is historically naive, if not a cynical marketing strategy, given that its emphasis on audience concerns may serve the circulation and profit interests of media owners and advertisers, rather than citizens' democratic needs (e.g. Hardt, 1999). Journalists often mock public journalism as a 'quasi-religious movement' promulgated by preachers and gurus.[1] Others say it simply represents good journalism. More-over, criticisms offered by various groups sometimes interact, seeming to offer mutual confirmation. For example, Mindich (2005) dismisses public journal-ism as a way to re-interest young Americans in news, although this would seem to address the problems he identifies, simply because many journalists and media critics reject it. The 2003 demise of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism has been interpreted as signaling the end of public journalism.

Here we analyze and respond to the most significant criticisms of scholars and, where relevant, practicing journalists, beginning with general theoretical challenges and moving to more specific accusations. Although criticisms of public journalism often turn out to be contradictory, we use them to outline what public journalism is and could be. That is, to contribute to the debate about the role of journalism in a democratic society, we respond to these criticisms both descriptively and normatively, and then offer suggestions regarding the long-term viability of public journalism.

Accusation: public journalism lacks a clear conceptual definition

Most commonly, public journalism's advocates offer up only vague notions of public journalism as a movement whose primary goal is to promote civic commitment and participation in democratic processes. In its early years, this generality may have been strategic, but one of the most fundamental criti-cisms of public journalism continues to be its definitional ambiguity. In contrast to journalists, who asserted it was overtheorized, scholars – even those

who are sympathetic to the spirit of public journalism – have criticized advocates for not clarifying whether public journalism is or has a journalistic philosophy, and for not specifying how public journalism differs from other journalism forms (e.g. Lichtenberg, 1999; Voakes, 1999). Several scholars rightly complain that, without an explicit public philosophy, advocates cannot respond to criticisms or evaluate its effectiveness (e.g. Glasser, 2000; Meyer, 1998). That is, a coherent public philosophy should precede and thus undergird articulation of particular practices.

Intellectual and historical resources are certainly available to help formulate a coherent public philosophy for public journalism, notably Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere and critiques of Habermas, such as Fraser's (1990). Earlier resources include the Walter Lippmann–John Dewey debate about journalism's democratic role and responsibility, the 1947 report of the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, and Siebert et al.'s (1956) account of the social responsibility theory of the press. Moreover, other journalism reform movements, such as muckraking and development journalism, are relevant.

In sum, despite 15 years of theoretical debate and practical experimentation, advocates have not yet settled on a definitive conceptualization of public journalism. The absence of a coherent public philosophy for the movement continues to provoke major criticisms.

Accusation: public journalism's operational definition and ideas of how it differs from mainstream practices are not clear

Some scholars are less concerned with the lack of a public philosophy, but instead worry about whether public journalism can be or has been effectively operationalized. Ironically, some critics complain that public journalism is merely a set of journalistic practices and techniques. A few critics accept public journalism's best practices as what good journalists always or at least usually do, albeit without being called public journalism. But others assert that advocates cannot clarify how news coverage conducted under the banner of public journalism differs from conventional, mainstream journalism (e.g. Lichtenberg, 1999; Voakes, 1999).

We argue that public journalism does present a marked contrast and challenge to conventional, mainstream journalism, given public journalists' emphasis on listening to citizens and figuring out what they want to know, incorporating the perspectives of citizens rather than politicians, experts, and other elite actors, and attending to how citizens could address issues in

practice. With some exceptions, voluminous empirical studies of public journalism's election reporting, special projects, and daily news coverage show significant differences. Compared to conventional news organizations' coverage of politics, news organizations practicing public journalism: (1) produce greater amounts of election-related reporting; (2) include more staff-written stories; (3) focus more on substantive election issues, candidates' qualifications for office, and candidates' policy records; (4) de-emphasize polls, campaign-managed events, and candidates' strategies and image-management tactics; (5) include more mobilizing information; and (6) rely more on non-elite sources, including women and minorities, than on elite sources for information (e.g. Haas, 2001; Kurpius, 2002; Massey, 1998).

For example, in covering a proposed property tax increase for local public schools, the *Colorado Springs Gazette* carried four versions of the same story written from the perspectives of four key publics (residents with children in public schools; teachers; students and recent graduates; and residents without children in public schools). The editor prefaced each story with a note explaining from whose perspective the story was written (Rosen, 1999). Many news organizations have restructured their newsrooms; instead of conventional beat systems revolving around authoritative sources, multiple teams focus on specific issues of concern to citizens (Gade and Perry, 2003).

Public journalism has not transformed news organizations still opposing the movement; a cursory look at coverage of the 2004 US Presidential election turns up enormous amounts of horse-race reporting, and of journalists discussing campaign strategies with one another and scoring debates and speeches. Nevertheless, public journalism coverage has had an impact. While the research is often fragmentary and small-scale, it shows that the features mentioned above increase citizens': (1) interest in and knowledge of election and community issues; (2) knowledge of candidates' and public officials' stands on issues; (3) voting participation; (4) interpersonal discussion of issues; (5) participation in community problem-solving activities; and (6) inclination to contact public officials about community problems (e.g. Bowers and Walker, 2003; Denton and Thorson, 1998; Meyer and Potter, 2000).

More research remains to be done, including on how the effects of public journalism coverage are distributed within given communities. Researchers should also address whether public journalism coverage helps reduce the deficit in political knowledge and participation among groups of low socio-economic status. More needs to be learned about who specifically benefits and how the political benefits of democratic participation are socially distributed. Moreover, long-term assessments need to be systematically conducted by outside researchers, if they are to be credible and if they are to avoid an implausible

hypodermic needle approach. If fuller conceptual work was short-circuited by concern for attracting supporters among professional journalists and news organizations, so the current focus on conducting short-term evaluations has sidelined attempts to articulate and elaborate a set of principles.

Accusation: public journalism ignores its own commercial context or, worse, is a profit-oriented strategy

Some scholars accept public journalism's philosophical commitment to en-hancing civic participation but question its ability to further this goal in practice, given the constraints imposed by commercial media systems. Ad-vocates are faulted for ignoring the commercial context of most public journalism and, more specifically, for failing to acknowledge that its chances of promoting broad-based citizen participation in democratic processes are inherently limited by media owners' and advertisers' commercial interests in catering to demographically attractive audiences, whose needs are not neces-sarily the most politically compelling (e.g. Iggers, 1998; Pauly 1999). Other scholars argue that by appealing to the civic conscience of individual editors and reporters, and by casting journalism's problems as rhetorical rather than structural, advocates will neither demand nor inspire fundamental changes to the commercial logic of news organizations (e.g. Peters, 1999; Schudson, 1999). Even more cynical scholars claim, as previously noted, that not only is public journalism's emphasis on addressing audience concerns not revolu-tionary, but it is likely to serve the circulation and profit interests of media owners and advertisers (e.g. Hardt, 1999).

Granted, that scholars and journalists would dismiss public journalism as merely a strategy for increasing profits is not surprising, given that this has motivated so many other journalistic 'reforms' invented and ordered by corporate officers. Indeed, the Gannett newspaper company, one of public journalism's long-standing supporters, launched in 2004 its 'Real Life, Real News' initiative. Explicitly aimed at increasing circulation and profits, notably through reader surveys conducted by the marketing departments of individual news outlets, this initiative encourages individual news outlets to place more emphasis on the impact of news stories on readers' everyday lives. Contrary to public journalism's focus on engaging citizens in deliberation and problem-solving, as members of larger, politically involved publics, this initiative addresses audiences as individual consumers of news concerned with its impact on their private lives. At the very least, this suggests that commercial

interests and democratic concerns coexist within news organizations practicing public journalism. Moreover, few advocates have explicitly considered the public journalism movement's ability to pursue its goals within commercial media systems. Thus, the hopes may be naive. On the other hand, the impact of public journalism projects have at best produced only 'modest' increases in readership/subscriptions. In at least one case, ironically involving that of public journalism pioneer Davis Merritt, the *Wichita Eagle* lost circulation (see Grimes, 1999). No evidence suggests that public journalism increases profits; indeed, projects are costly.

Meanwhile, market imperatives do not necessarily prevent news organizations from promoting broad-based citizen participation in democratic processes. Evidence suggests that public journalism projects take up issues and address citizen groups that are commercially unpopular. More than one-fifth of the 650 public journalism projects conducted through 2002 – nearly all by commercial news organizations, with the exception of some by public broadcasters – have confronted major issues, such as race relations, poverty, and inner-city crime (Friedland and Nichols, 2002). Other public journalism topics of particular relevance to marginalized groups and people of lower socio-economic status include alcohol and drug abuse, child care, domestic violence, health care, homelessness, immigration, public housing, racial profiling, unemployment, and welfare (Friedland and Nichols, 2002). That is, news organizations have spent considerable resources, both material and symbolic, documenting the plight of the most disenfranchised segments of the citizenry. Among other activities, news organizations have sponsored deliberative forums such as focus groups, roundtable discussions, and town-hall meetings for people of lower socio-economic status and other marginalized or minority groups. Again, these are hardly the segments of the citizenry coveted by advertisers and, by extension, media owners. Thus, contrary to the accusation that public journalism represents pandering, public journalism projects have not been geared to the wealthy and powerful segments that this claim implies would be most attractive to news management.

More broadly and also contrary to conventional wisdom, more than 90 percent of public journalism projects have focused on long-standing, deeply embedded community issues rather than on particular or short-term events. Meanwhile, fewer than 10 percent of the 650 public journalism projects conducted so far have focused on election campaigns (Friedland and Nichols, 2002). Where public journalism projects have been tied to election campaigns or similar 'events', news organizations have often (but not always) successfully linked this reporting to community issues, for example, by inviting local residents to help shape their coverage. This suggests, in turn, that public

journalism has avoided the commercial media's reliance on episodic (event-based), as opposed to thematic (issue-based), news coverage.

Further evidence of the willingness of commercial news organizations to transcend narrow competitive agendas comes from the numerous multiple-media partnerships. Of 230 collaborative public journalism projects conducted so far, more than 160 have included partnerships between newspapers as well as commercial and public broadcasters (Friedland and Nichols, 2002). Contrary to the claim that inter-media alliances homogenize news coverage (e.g. Grimes, 1999), participating news organizations coordinate their reporting so as to maximize reach and impact while producing complementary, as opposed to overlapping, coverage (see Denton and Thorson, 1998). In any case, surely competition has not insured diversity, and chain ownership has a far greater impact on the diversity of voices than such collaboration.

As to the most damning accusation that public journalism merely represents a cynical strategy for pandering to audiences, it is possible that some news organizations have embraced public journalism out of a concern with profit. Nevertheless, available research suggests that the factors predisposing a news organization to practice public journalism include the civic attitudes of its top executives. Studying the 19 largest publicly-held newspaper companies in the USA, Loomis and Meyer (2000) found that companies whose top executives expressed more concern for social responsibility than for generating profits were significantly more likely to practice public journalism than companies whose top executives favored profits over social responsibility. Granted, appealing to the civic conscience of individual editors and reporters will not inspire fundamental changes to the commercial logic of news organizations. Still, Loomis and Meyer's (2000) findings suggest that top executives with civic consciences can and do ensure that news organizations are guided at least in part by a concern for social responsibility. Interestingly, many media critics have accused the Gannett and Knight-Ridder chains of supporting public journalism primarily for commercial reasons. Yet, both newspaper companies scored higher on social responsibility than on profit orientation (Loomis and Meyer, 2000). As previously noted, Gannett's launch of its 'Real Life, Real News' initiative and continuous support of public journalism suggests that concerns for profit and social responsibility occupy a perhaps uneasy coexistence within individual news organizations. Nevertheless, the controversial nature of public journalism projects (and especially ones that tackle politically unpopular issues of concern to commercially unpopular publics), and the broader mandate of public journalism tapping readers' concerns, as well as the very costliness of public journalism, suggests that this particular attack is better positioned as a general critique of contemporary journalism than a problem particular to public journalism.

Accusation: public journalism lacks a coherent, useful view of the public and of common reasoning

A more specific debate concerns what notion of the public should motivate public journalism. Briefly put, while some scholars argue that public journalism should be embedded within a communitarian democratic framework, which assumes that the public shares an overarching vision of the common good (e.g. Christians, 1999), other scholars argue that public journalism should be embedded within a liberal democratic framework, which accepts that citizens are individuals who share little more than their interest in free choice and who merely happen to live in a given nation-state (e.g. Schudson, 1999). Neither communitarianism nor liberalism, however, offers democratically viable frameworks for public journalism. Communitarianism underestimates the existence of conflicting, if not competing, visions of the common good both within and beyond the local community. Liberalism lacks a strong sense of shared purpose needed to undergird citizen participation in joint deliberation and action.

We suggest beginning with the idea of the 'reasoning public' and the assumption that citizens share a commitment to engage in 'common reasoning'. After all, nearly half of the 650 public journalism projects conducted so far have included some form of public deliberation sponsored by news organizations, such as focus groups, roundtable discussions, and town-hall meetings (Friedland and Nichols, 2002). Again, by encouraging citizens to discuss further the issues covered and participate in community problem-solving activities, many of these projects have stimulated citizens' willingness to engage in common reasoning. As Habermas might put it, public journalists can assume a shared commitment to subjecting everyone's opinions, and the underlying reasons for espousing certain opinions, to rational-critical evaluation. This implies, in turn, that journalists ought to help create and sustain an open-ended public sphere to which all citizens have access, and in which all issues of concern to citizens and all available opinions can be articulated and deliberated.

In addition, Glasser and Craft (1998) legitimately argue that face-to-face dialogue and mass-mediated deliberation point to different forms of democracy and thus imply different roles for journalists. The ideal of dialogue implies a direct participatory form of democracy in which journalists support citizens' opportunities to engage in actual social interaction. The ideal of deliberation, however, implies a deliberative democracy in which reportage aims to inspire all citizens' considered judgment; to accomplish this, journalists would need to frame topics as issues rather than as events and then encourage debate and commentary without regard for the speaker's power and privilege in society. As

discussed, public journalism projects meet both requirements. Nearly all projects focus on long-standing community issues and rely more on non-elite sources, including women and minorities, than on elite sources.

The actual practice of public journalism suggests that dialogue and deliberation are essential, complementary aspects of common reasoning that can be integrated into a continuous cycle. Briefly put, news organizations commonly convene focus group discussions with small groups of citizens to identify issues that citizens would like to see covered; base news stories on those focus group discussions that citizens can use during social interaction; and report back on citizens' social interactions for the benefit of a wider audience. Thus, mass-mediated deliberation exposes a wide audience to other perspectives. Face-to-face dialogue enables debate. Moreover, the judgments formed during face-to-face dialogue are channeled back into the process of mass-mediated deliberation to be considered by a wider audience.

Accusation: public journalism incorrectly presumes consensus

Several scholars accuse public journalism projects of pushing for consensual solutions to problems wrongly presumed to be suffered equally by all social groups (e.g. Hackett and Zhao, 1998; Pauly, 1999). These critics claim public journalism's pursuit of consensus is likely to suppress awareness of conflicting interests among citizens, impede open citizen deliberations, or even bolster agendas that masquerade as representing the interests of all citizens. We agree the premium on consensus is problematic, and so encourage journalists to nurture a public sphere understood as comprising multiple discursive domains, in which different social groups can deliberate among themselves before doing so jointly. Public journalism should promote public deliberation that helps people as individuals and as members of social groups understand not only that they may have conflicting interests, but also that some interests deserve more protection than others. Thus, journalists should aim to promote genuine participatory parity in the public sphere by ensuring that subordinate social groups enjoy the same opportunities as dominant social groups to articulate their particular concerns. Journalists can do this by foregrounding the issues of subordinate social groups and emphasizing salient social inequalities, and by offering citizens opportunities to reflect on the particular social locations from which they view given issues and on how those social locations affect their sense of problems and solutions.

Researchers have so far not empirically investigated whether public journalism projects consistently enable subordinate social groups to enjoy the same – much less enhanced – opportunity as dominant social groups to

express their concerns publicly. On one hand, at least some news organizations have aimed to promote participatory parity among subordinate and dominant social groups. For example, in its much-celebrated series about crime, the *Charlotte Observer* ran many articles written from the perspectives of local black residents (Friedland, 2000). Likewise, as part of its Pulitzer Prize-winning race-relations project, the *Akron Beacon Journal* conducted separate focus group discussions with local black and white residents. The resulting articles allowed participants to elaborate on their views, fully and with little editorial interference. More local residents were cited than government officials and experts combined (Haas, 2001). On the other hand, the *Beacon Journal* tended to ask experts, not residents, to elaborate on the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to racial inequalities.

Accusation: public journalism abdicates its professional responsibilities or, conversely, is not formally accountable to the public

Consistently one of the most persuasive critics of public journalism, Glasser (2000) accuses public journalists of abdicating their professional authority and responsibility for setting the news agenda. Letting citizens set the news agenda, he adds, substitutes the community's judgment for journalists' judgment; this confuses community values with good values and prevents journalists from explaining how their values coincide with, or depart from, those of the community. Journalists agree that letting citizens set the news agenda compromises journalists' ability to maintain a critical editorial and reportorial stance vis-a-vis the community, and forces journalists to gloss over community conflicts for fear of offending certain community segments.

Yet, to some degree, most journalists already share their agenda-setting authority with citizens, although this is more systematic and intentional for public journalists. Many public journalism news organizations have instituted regular, if informal, means of including citizens in the agenda-setting process, such as by conducting focus groups or town-hall meetings with citizens before embarking on given projects, or by meeting with civic groups to learn which issues they would like to see covered. Nonetheless, we agree that public journalists ultimately retain the authority to add to or subtract from the agenda that their public listening reveals. In this sense, they are like mainstream journalists, although the latter listen to government officials, experts, and advertisers, instead of citizens. Thus, public journalists' efforts to involve citizens in the agenda-setting process differs from mainstream, commercially-driven market surveys in several important respects. First, instead of polling readers to

identify issues that interest them as individual consumers of news, public journalists address citizens as members of deliberative publics concerned with issues that go beyond their immediate self-interests. Relatedly, instead of conceiving of readers as mere receivers of news, public journalists conceive of readers as citizens who might be interested in becoming involved in efforts to address given issues in practice. Moreover, public journalists must articulate their own agenda as distinct from that of particular communities, if they are to be able to justify why, in the interests of justice and democratic parity, they foreground the issues and opinions of certain community segments over others.

Ironically, Schudson (1999) criticizes public journalism for retaining the authority of journalists as trustees, as professionals who know better than citizens themselves what citizens need. Mocking public journalism as a cautious and even conservative reform movement in the Progressive Era tradition, Schudson claims that its principled rhetoric notwithstanding, public journalism fails to dislodge journalists' control. Schudson faults public journalism for falling (far) short of proposing to vest authority in the public: It does not propose more formal (or even informal) media accountability systems such as national news councils, citizen media review boards, or publicly elected publishers and editors.

We agree that public journalists have not managed to nurture what several scholars refer to as a public sphere 'about' journalism (e.g. Rosen, 1991), that is, to provide citizens with opportunities to publicly criticize news coverage in terms of explicitly stated journalistic values and to hold journalists accountable. Public journalism still needs better mechanisms for publicly responding to citizen criticisms. Although various informal measures such as reader feedback (often actively solicited) may sensitize journalists to citizens' views, more formal measures would ensure sustained, meaningful citizen participation.

Accusation: problem-solving by journalists is inappropriate

The very idea that journalists should help solve problems has sparked some of the most heated opposition from scholarly and journalistic critics of public journalism, albeit for different reasons. Scholars argue public journalists exaggerate their importance as agents of political change (e.g. Peters, 1999; Schudson, 1999). Meanwhile, journalists argue that such involvement compromises their independence and blurs the distinction between impartial reporting and political advocacy; it forces them to take sides in political conflicts, and forces them to gloss over complex problems for which no simple solutions exist. Scholars and journalists both claim that only designated political actors and institutions can solve problems.

We argue, again, that journalists do and should participate in problem-solving. The question is how. Before embarking on any problem-solving activity, journalists need to carefully consider whether given problems can be adequately addressed through voluntary citizen intervention or whether these problems require more deep-seated, systemic intervention, and whether problems could be adequately addressed through local community intervention, or instead require intervention of regional, state, national, or even international scope. Briefly put, for problems potentially resolvable through local community intervention, journalists could facilitate citizens' efforts to design and enact solutions. Conversely, for problems requiring intervention of a broader scope, journalists could encourage citizens to join larger-scale civic organizations, and encourage citizens to push for larger-scale systemic intervention. In both cases, if citizens are unwilling to act, press coverage may apply pressure on relevant actors and institutions.

The intention of this problem-solving model is to avoid exaggerating journalists' importance as agents of political change, but also to acknowledge that some problems may be resolvable through active citizen involvement. In some cases, citizen intervention itself is a worthy goal, while other problems require large-scale systemic intervention. At a minimum, to ensure effective citizen intervention, news organizations should sponsor more consistent deliberative forums than ad hoc discussions or town-hall meetings (Glasser, 1999; Iggers, 1998). Overall, a fair criticism is that news organizations practicing public journalism rarely push for systemic intervention beyond the local community. Similarly, as Glasser (1999) and Schudson (1999) note, journalists should be concerned with both the processes and outcomes of citizen deliberation. While journalists should ensure that citizen deliberations are open and egalitarian, the interventions advocated as a result of those deliberations should correspond to the nature of the particular problem.

Finally, public journalists must overcome their apparent distrust of experts and expertise (Iggers, 1998; Schudson, 1999). Public journalism projects often appear to presume that the involvement of experts taints the authentic expression of public opinion. Instead, journalists should engage citizens and experts in genuine dialogue. One mechanism for enhancing citizen-expert interaction are so-called 'consensus conferences'. During consensus conferences, a sample of citizens (typically 10–16) charged with examining a contentious problem receives background information about the problem, spends time deliberating, poses questions to experts, assesses the experts' responses, and then generates recommendations. Like public journalism projects more generally, consensus conferences have been found to increase citizen panel members' knowledge, their confidence about interacting with experts, and their willingness to participate in civic activities (see Haas, 2006).

Conclusion

Public journalism has undergone a remarkable evolution since its relatively humble beginnings 15 years ago as occasional, special projects among a handful of small-scale and medium-sized newspapers. By 1998 more than 60 percent of daily newspapers had experimented with various public journalism practices (Arant and Meyer, 1998). Friedland and Nichols (2002) interpret the fact that 45 percent of the projects have been undertaken by news organizations involved with public journalism for five or more years to indicate their strong commitment to public journalism. Conversely, these statistics may indicate that, whether on the basis of short-term experimentation or philosophical principle, many news organizations remain opposed to *and* unchanged by public journalism. Empirical research and conceptual analysis show that some of the accusations against public journalism were never fair; others are no longer fair. But public journalism practice is still flawed and theorizing remains ambiguous. Not only are these problems interstructured, the newsroom and the classroom present interrelated challenges to public journalism's long-term viability.

Notably, Friedland (2003) found that the *Charlotte Observer*, the news organization most successful in sustaining its commitment to public journalism over time, had institutionalized numerous public journalism practices within its daily information-gathering and reporting routines. In large part, broad-based newsroom support of public journalism's goals and a high level of commitment on the part of top management enabled this routinization. Again, while the civic attitudes of top management may determine whether a news organization initially commits to public journalism, such support alone does not guarantee that this commitment will be sustained. Wisely, then, top management made a conscious effort from the very beginning to include rank-and-file editors and reporters in developing a more public orientation. Public journalism's long-term viability depends on the presence of broad-based newsroom support and institutionalization within its information-gathering and reporting routines.

Meanwhile, recent studies of journalism students' attitudes toward public journalism suggest that achieving broad-based newsroom support may be difficult, although by no means impossible (e.g. McDevitt et al., 2002). Like practicing journalists more generally (see Voakes, 1999), students tend to favor public journalism's less controversial practices, such as focusing attention on particular community problems; they are less supportive of journalistically controversial practices, such as sponsoring forums aimed at helping citizens formulate possible solutions to problems. More significantly, students' overall support of public journalism decreases when they work for campus or local

newspapers. The dynamics of identification with and socialization into professional newsroom culture make it difficult for students to reconcile public journalism's notion that journalists should focus on citizens' concerns with the mainstream ideal of professional autonomy, which implies that journalists should wholly determine the form and content of reporting.

These newsroom-classroom problems are interrelated, especially to the extent that professional journalists or retired (or embittered) journalists, who are the most likely to be highly suspicious of public journalism, are teaching journalism courses, writing textbooks, and, as deans and directors of journalism programs, are dictating the journalism curriculum. If public journalism is not introduced and nurtured in journalism schools as a worthy project that offers professional identity and status, students are unlikely to bring to their future workplaces the kind of receptivity to public journalism necessary for its newsroom institutionalization. Fortunately, public journalism continues to make inroads in journalism courses and in journalism education more generally. A dozen major universities offer relevant courses. Formed in 2003 to help educators and journalists work together, the Public Journalism Network (PJN) has committed itself to strengthening public journalism education, practice, and scholarship in relation to the theory and practice of democracy.

Meanwhile, the public journalism movement is potentially itself in the process of changing in the face of online opportunities. Even PJN president Leonard Witt (2004), who holds an endowed chair at Kennesaw State University dedicated to advancing public journalism, suggests that public journalism is 'morphing' into 'the public's journalism'. Examples include a South Korean online site, *OhmyNews*, which supplements its professional staff with 30,000 'citizen reporters', and *BBC Leeds*' 'Where I Live' site, part of the *BBC*'s national 'Voices' campaign, which offers local residents opportunities to work as 'community correspondents'. The enthusiasm for these kinds of sites and especially for the increasingly popular activity of blogging suggests that citizens can and want to use the Internet to enter the public sphere. Yet, whether such 'participatory' forms of journalism should be equated with 'the public's journalism' is not at all clear. Indeed, there are reasons to question whether 'citizen reporters', 'community correspondents' or bloggers can undertake rigorous investigation and sustained, original coverage of important public issues. Most of the content consists of expressions of personal interests and feelings (*OhmyNews*) or notices about highly local civic events (*BBC Leeds*). Group and individual websites can engage people on defined sets of issues – notably, in robust critiques of journalism and media. But they do not stimulate sustained debate, deliberation and action on a range of issues, especially on issues that do not affect people directly or personally (i.e. instead, affect

'others'). These kinds of reader contributions seem to function primarily as marketing devices.

Public journalism's long-term viability depends on articulating the theory and practice of public journalism in several crucial ways. First, it must recognize and underscore differences among publics and avoid the more naive boosterism and market-vulnerable notion of consensus inherent in references to 'civic' projects. Even within local communities, the public sphere is not a single space or unitary phenomenon, but embraces counterpublics whose interests are often stubbornly unequal and at odds. Second, in classrooms and newsrooms, it must address and incorporate journalists' insistence on professional autonomy while preserving and instilling a commitment to public service and respect for citizens not merely as individual thinkers and actors, but also as members of distinct counterpublics. Finally, it must engage in self-criticism and in criticism of the economic constraints on the press more generally, and encourage citizens to join in such vigorous critiques.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   While space limitations preclude us from providing references to criticisms by journalists, dozens of such references can be found in Delli Carpini (1998) and Haas and Steiner (2002).

References

Arant, David and Philip Meyer (1998) 'Public Journalism and Traditional Journalism: A Shift in Values?', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 13(4): 205–18.

Bowers, James and Gary Walker (2003) 'Public Journalism and Voting Participation in Statewide Referendums: The Case of Rochester, New York', in Joseph Harper and Thom Yantek (eds) *Media, Profit, and Politics: Competing Priorities in an Open Society*, pp. 109–21. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

Christians, Clifford (1999) 'The Common Good as First Principle', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 67–84. New York: Guilford Press.

Delli Carpini, Michael (1998) *Reframing News: Press Coverage of Public Journalism, 1993–1997*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation.

Denton, Frank and Esther Thorson (1998) 'Effects of a Multimedia Public Journalism Project on Political Knowledge and Attitudes', in Edmund Lambeth, Philip Meyer and Esther Thorson (eds) *Assessing Public Journalism*, pp. 143–57. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Fraser, Nancy (1990) 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text* 25–26: 56–80.

Friedland, Lewis (2000) 'Public Journalism and Community Change', in Anthony Eksterowicz and Robert Roberts (eds) *Public Journalism and Political Knowledge*, pp. 121–42. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Friedland, Lewis (2003) *Public Journalism: Past and Future*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation.

Friedland, Lewis and Sandy Nichols (2002) *Measuring Civic Journalism's Progress: A Report Across a Decade of Activity*. Washington, DC: Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

Gade, Peter and Earnest Perry (2003) 'Changing the Newsroom Culture: A Four-Year Case Study of Organizational Development at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80(2): 327–47.

Glasser, Theodore (1999) 'The Idea of Public Journalism', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 3–18. New York: Guilford Press.

Glasser, Theodore (2000) 'The Politics of Public Journalism', *Journalism Studies* 1(4): 683–86.

Glasser, Theodore and Stephanie Craft (1998) 'Public Journalism and the Search for Democratic Ideals', in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds) *Media, Ritual and Identity*, pp. 203–18. London: Routledge.

Grimes, Charlotte (1999) 'Whither the Civic Journalism Bandwagon?', Discussion Paper D-36, Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Haas, Tanni (2001) 'Public Journalism Project Falls Short of Stated Goals', *Newspaper Research Journal* 22(3): 58–70.

Haas, Tanni (2006) 'Expert and Lay in Public Journalism: Lessons from the Consensus Conference Model', in Bala Musa and Cynthia Price (eds) *Opposite Forces: Issues and Conflicts in American Journalism*, pp. 59–81. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

Haas, Tanni and Linda Steiner (2002) 'Fears of Corporate Colonization in Journalism Reviews' Critiques of Public Journalism', *Journalism Studies* 3(3): 325–41.

Habermas, Jurgen (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hackett, Robert and Yuezhi Zhao (1998) *Sustaining Democracy?: Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Hardt, Hanno (1999) 'Reinventing the Press for the Age of Commercial Appeals: Writings on and about Public Journalism', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 197–209. New York: Guilford Press.

Iggers, Jeremy (1998) *Good News, Bad News: Journalism Ethics and the Public Interest*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kurpius, David (2002) 'Sources and Civic Journalism: Changing Patterns of Reporting?', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79(4): 853–66.

Lichtenberg, Judith (1999) 'Beyond the Public Journalism Controversy', in Robert Fullinwider (ed.) *Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal*, pp. 341–54. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Loomis, Davis and Philip Meyer (2000) 'Opinion Without Polls: Finding a Link Between Corporate Culture and Public Journalism', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 12(3): 276–84.

McDevitt, Michael, Bob Gassaway and Frank Perez (2002) 'The Making and Unmaking of Civic Journalists: Influence of Professional Socialization', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79(1): 87–100.

Massey, Brian (1998) 'Civic Journalism and Non-Elite Sourcing: Making Routine Newswork of Community Connectedness', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 75(2): 394–407.

Meyer, Philip (1998) 'If It Works, How Will We Know?', in Edmund Lambeth, Philip Meyer and Esther Thorson (eds) *Assessing Public Journalism*, pp. 251–73. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Meyer, Philip and Deborah Potter (2000) 'Hidden Value: Polls and Public Journalism', in Paul Lavrakas and Michael Traugott (eds) *Election Polls, the News Media, and Democracy*, pp. 113–41. New York: Seven Bridges Press.

Mindich, David (2005) *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pauly, John (1999) 'Journalism and the Sociology of Public Life', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 134–51. New York: Guilford Press.

Peters, John (1999) 'Public Journalism and Democratic Theory: Four Challenges', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 99–117. New York: Guilford Press.

Rosen, Jay (1991) 'Making Things More Public', *Communication* 12(3): 267–84.

Rosen, Jay (1999) *What Are Journalists For?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Schudson, Michael (1999) 'What Public Journalism Knows about Journalism, But Doesn't Know about the Public', in Theodore Glasser (ed.) *The Idea of Public Journalism*, pp. 118–33. New York: Guilford Press.

Siebert, Fred, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Voakes, Paul (1999) 'Civic Duties: Newspaper Journalists' Views on Public Journalism', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 76(4): 756–74.

Witt, Leonard (2004) 'Is Public Journalism Morphing Into The Public's Journalism?', *National Civic Review* 93(3): 49–57.

Biographical notes

Tanni Haas is Associate Professor in the Department of Speech Communication Arts & Sciences at Brooklyn College. His research on public journalism and related topics has appeared in almost two-dozen scholarly journals and books.
Address: Department of Speech Communication Arts & Sciences, Brooklyn College, 3439 Boylan Hall, Brooklyn, New York 11210–2889, USA. [email: thaas@brooklyn.cuny.edu].

Linda Steiner is Associate Professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University.
Address: Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rutgers University, 4 Huntington Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901–1071, USA. [email: lsteiner@scils.rutgers.edu].