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THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF JOURNALISM
Contentious metadiscourse on constructive journalism and solutions journalism

Tanja Aitamurto and **Anita Varma**

This paper examines the normative role of constructive journalism—also called "solutions journalism"—by analyzing metajournalistic discourse about solutions-focused journalism. The findings show that constructive and solutions journalism are defined similarly: they profess traditional Anglo-Saxon journalistic norms and practices, even as they shift focus from problems to solutions. The metajournalistic discourse indicates a tension over the normative roles of journalism. Constructive journalism justifies its existence by the intensified need to solve vexing social issues. At the same time, proponents of constructive journalism regularly distance themselves from advocating for social good and claim to objectively cover solutions without endorsing them. This strategic rhetoric signals an attempt to draw a sharp line between constructive journalism and advocacy, and to situate constructive journalism within the boundaries of a traditional monitorial role of journalism. Metadiscourse about constructive journalism reveals reluctance to acknowledge and articulate its normative constructive role that seeks to help society.

Introduction

Mainstream news often focuses on problems, crises, and negativity (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2001), which has prompted concern from practitioners and scholars because a singular focus on negativity contributes to audiences becoming disillusioned and disinterested in civic issues (Oliver 2016; Krüger 2017). In light of these concerns, solutions-oriented approaches in journalism have gained renewed momentum in recent years: in Europe and the United States, constructive journalism—also called "solutions journalism"—has emerged as a form of journalism that aims to create positive social impact (Gyldensted 2011, 2015; Haagerup 2014; McIntyre 2015) by informing people of issues and by suggesting specific, effective ways to resolve these issues (Gans 2011; Varma 2017). Predicated on the possibility and desirability of social progress, constructive journalism focuses on initiatives that seek to solve society's problems.

Constructive journalism has gained a foothold in various news outlets: for example, *The Christian Science Monitor* has created a "Take Action" section which blends journalism and social advocacy. Similarly, the *Huffington Post* has an "Impact" section with the theme "What's Working." *Upworthy*, a digital news site, declares its intent to publish content "that make the world a better place." Moreover, some news outlets have established special

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divisions to work on beats that use solutions journalism. The *Seattle Times* Education Lab covers solutions to persistent challenges in public education. Several journalism schools in the United States and in Europe are teaching classes about constructive journalism, alongside professional journalism training institutes such as the Poynter Institute in the United States. Of particular interest are nonprofits such as the Constructive Journalism Project, established in London in 2014 by Danielle Batist and Seán Dagan Wood and the Solutions Journalism Network, founded in 2013 by New York Times "Fixes" columnists David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg, and Feministing.com editor emeritus Courtney Martin, which have become central hubs for a rising tide of constructive journalism across newsrooms in the United States and Europe.

How contemporary constructive journalism both reinforces and challenges dominant Anglo-Saxon journalistic norms and practices remains unclear. To understand the nature, boundaries, and significance of constructive journalism in Anglo-Saxon settings[1] such as the US and UK, in this paper, we ask: what does constructive journalism mean, how is it situated within the shifting boundaries of journalism, and what is its significance for normative roles of journalism?

We address these questions by analyzing metajournalistic discourse (Carlson 2015a, 2015b) by the Solutions Journalism Network, Constructive Voices initiatives, and Constructive Journalism Project. Metadiscourse, here, refers to discourse about these new forms of journalism published in news articles and on the websites of the organizations promoting them. By examining the metajournalistic discourse that surrounds and constitutes constructive journalism initiatives, we critically articulate the norms within these approaches to journalism that diverge from objectivity and accuracy. Our focus on objectivity and accuracy stems from the specifically Anglo-Saxon focus of this paper. In the US and the UK, an ideal of objectivity enacted through practices aimed at prioritizing accuracy has been a mainstay of mainstream publications that are now making space for constructive journalism's ideal of social progress enacted through practices aimed at emphasizing hope. We argue that constructive journalism is not just a genre of news but also constitutes a distinctive normative role for the press that should be added to the widely accepted normative roles of a monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative press in Christians et al. (2009).

The key distinguishing aspects of a constructive role are a focus on solutions to social problems, an ideal of social progress, reporting practices oriented around hope, high interventionism, and positioning the journalist as what Krüger (2017) calls a "change-agent" (410–411). A constructive role encompasses a wide breadth of journalisms, such as advocacy journalism, impact journalism, heartening journalism, future-focused journalism, transformation journalism, development journalism, and emancipatory journalism (Carpentier 2005, 206–207; Hanitzsch 2007, 381; Krüger 2017, 405–406), and has precedents in public journalism, peace journalism, and activist journalism. As Christians et al. (2009) have noted, journalism seldom fits neatly into a single normative category, but distinguishing and developing these categories is nevertheless conceptually useful for understanding the distinctive motives and aspirations of different types of journalism.

This paper begins by situating constructive journalism conceptually and historically. Then, we present metadiscourse data and our methodology for analysis, followed by the findings section. In the findings section, we examine the definitions and motivations for constructive journalism using metadiscourse analysis and this metadiscourse's implications for journalistic norms and practices. We conclude by arguing that a normative constructive role emerges from the metadiscourse, and summarize key conceptual distinctions between

normative roles, shown in Table 1. Finally, we consider the significance of this role for the boundaries of journalism.

Continuously Shifting Boundaries: "Reform Project" Precedents of Constructive Journalism

What is Journalism? Dimensions, Axes, and Roles

The question of "what is journalism?" has become especially pressing in an era of concern about the rise of "fake news" through digital platforms (Rogers and Bromwich 2016), and news outlets that champion trading impartiality for polarizing partisanship (Waisbord 2009, 373). Compounded by the proliferation of new forms and norms of journalism in a digital context (that now encompasses hybrid social media platforms as well as formal publications, news sites, and blogs), demarcating journalism from other forms of content becomes a slippery endeavor as what "counts" as journalism shifts and expands. In an Anglo-Saxon setting, a baseline assumption about journalism is that it seeks to inform people of timely issues and events—but what it means to inform people, and to what end, varies substantially and leads journalists in divergent directions.

The boundaries of journalism, Matt Carlson (2015a, 2015b) argues, are amorphous and shifting. Carlson envisions journalism

> as a varied cultural practice embedded within a complicated social landscape. Journalism is not a solid, stable thing to point to, but a constantly shifting denotation applied differently depending on context. Whatever is distinct about journalism must be continuously constructed (2).

The metadiscourse we analyze in this study provides insight into part of the process of how the meaning and distinctiveness of journalism is "continuously constructed." The following discussion demarcates boundaries between types of journalism, and we preface this discussion by acknowledging that these boundaries are never fixed or final.

As Hanitzsch (2007), Deuze (2005), and Carpentier (2005) have argued, journalism is best understood in multidimensional terms. For instance, Deuze (2005) develops a broadly applicable theory of journalism by arguing that there are "five ideal-typical traits or values" that "journalists feel … give legitimacy and credibility to what they do" (446), including objectivity, public service, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics (447). In related intellectual terrain, Hanitzsch (2007) offers a set of axes that comprise "institutional roles" that are relevant to delineating between and positioning distinct normative roles: interventionism, for instance, goes from "passive" to "active," while power distance spans from "adversary" to "loyal" (372–373). Hanitzsch (2007, 372) articulates the poles of these axes in the following terms:

> The distinction tracks along a divide between two types of journalist; the one interventionist, socially committed, and motivated, the other detached and uninvolved, dedicated to objectivity and impartiality … Journalism cultures on the [passive] side of the continuum stick to the principles of objectivity, neutrality, fairness, detachment, and impartiality, which are deeply rooted in the history of Western, and particularly U.S., journalism.

On the active side of the continuum are journalism movements in which the journalist becomes an active advocate. Constructive journalism is high in interventionism, since a

constructive journalist does not "stay apart from the flow of events, as does the neutral and disinterested observer, but … participate[s], intervene[s], get[s] involved, and promote[s] change" (373).

Christians et al.'s (2009) taxonomy of four normative roles of the press offers an instructive organizational scheme for understanding boundaries between normative roles of journalism, and journalism's relationship to advocacy and social progress. In this taxonomy, journalism has four roles: monitorial, facilitative, collaborative, and radical (139–218). A monitorial press aims to inform the public by keeping a watchful eye on those in seats of power in order to shine a spotlight on their actions. Oriented toward improving transparency, a monitorial press plays a role in ensuring that officials cannot perpetuate wrongdoing in darkened corridors of power (139–143). A facilitative press, on the other hand, promotes public deliberation across people in a society. Rather than seeking to inform people of the activities of those in power, a facilitative press acts as a moderator of deliberation by constructing an arena for public debate and encouraging public participation (158–159). In contrast, a radical press actively goes to "the roots of the power relations in society" (181) to lodge a systemic critique against structures that subjugate people. A radical press' role is not simply to inform or facilitate discourse but to actively condemn societal structures that may perpetuate domination and oppression (184). Finally, a collaborative press works harmoniously with outside institutions (196–198). A collaborative press "implies a partnership, [such as] a relationship between the media and the state built on mutual trust and a shared commitment to mutually agreeable means and ends" (198). These four roles, Christians et al have stipulated, are not mutually exclusive in practice but clarify the distinctive and often-contradictory motives, ideals, and orienting principles within journalism.

We contribute a fifth normative role of the press, a constructive role, which is distinctive in the sense that the press offers a vision of how society could move forward. This vision may or may not be proposals that journalists imagine themselves, but their decision to cover initiatives that seek to address ongoing social issues constitutes a latent endorsement of sparking social change as more desirable than conserving social stasis. McIntyre and Sobel (2017) have characterized constructive journalism as "an active participant in enhancing societal well-being" (1). With a constructive role, the central purpose of journalism is to forge a path to a better society by featuring solutions to ongoing problems. Table 1 shows the five normative roles of journalism and the main characteristics of these roles.

Journalism and Advocacy: Categorically Distinct or Intrinsically Intertwined?

A constructive role of journalism embeds a premise that offering and covering solutions remain within the auspices of journalism. On the other hand, the argument could be made that constructive reporting is no longer journalism and instead should be categorized as advocacy. Drawing boundaries between journalism and advocacy has been a bone of contention in journalism studies, as proponents of objectivity have argued that journalism's impartiality makes it distinctive from advocacy while critical scholars have argued that journalism is inseparable from strategic communication (Waisbord 2009; Fisher 2016). Advocacy in journalism is inescapable because, in Fisher's (2016) terms, "even unwittingly, the simple inclusion of a comment or perspective from a source by the reporter may inject a degree of advocacy to a story … The stronger and more passionately the sources advocate, the stronger the story" (722).

TABLE 1
The constructive role of journalism compared to other normative roles of journalism

Role	Monitorial	Facilitative	Collaborative	Radical	Constructive
Motive	Observe and document routine and unexpected events, place a check on power	Convene a conversation about public issues	Advance aims of an outside institution (such as the state, business, nonprofit group)	Critically scrutinize systemic power, offer alternatives to status quo	Provide solutions to address social problems
Ideal Orienting principle	Objectivity Accuracy, Transparency	Deliberation Inclusion	Allegiance Synergy, Strategic Communication	Solidarity Dissent	Social Progress Hope
Journalism provides	A watchdog that provides an ongoing check on power	Forum for debate and conversation	Megaphone to advance an outside institution's agenda	Criticism of existing power structures	Working and actionable solutions for remedying social problems
Journalist	Neutral observer; shines a spotlight on society's problems	Manager of discourse; acts as a moderator (not a participant)	Intermediary, provides a mouthpiece for outside institution	Critic, demands structural reform	"Change-agent" who documents, develops actionable solutions
Example	Watchdog Reporting, Investigative Reporting	Public Journalism	Public Relations	Advocacy Press	Solutions Journalism

Note: For the facilitative, monitorial, radical, and collaborative roles of journalism, see Christians et al. (2009).

Similarly, Silvio Waisbord (2009) has argued that even news that strives for objectivity is a form of advocacy as critics have argued that "the norm of 'objectivity' [becomes] a subterfuge for advocacy for status quo policies and ideologies" (373). Fisher concludes that the question for journalism scholars is not "whether advocacy is present in journalism, but the degree of its presence" (723) and suggests treating advocacy as a continuum that goes "from strident opinion or activist reporting at one end to straight news reporting at the other" comprising advocacy that ranges "from 'overt' to 'subtle'" (723). Constructive journalists become what Krüger (2017) calls "change-agents" (403), as they attempt not to document problems with a detached stance but instead push against social stasis by calling attention to the prospects for social change that are already at work. At the same time, journalists are more detached than a collaborative dynamic, such that their independence takes the form of latently endorsing the idea of social progress, but not necessarily allying themselves to one particular group or approach to doing so. More independent than a collaborative role, more committed than a monitorial role, more content-specific than the agnosticism of a facilitative role, and more impartial than a radical role, constructive journalism constitutes a separate normative role for the press which orients itself around hope, potential for change, and situates itself as close to—though still observing—a community and its issues.

Origins and Precedents of Constructive Journalism: Muckraking, Public Journalism, Peace Journalism, and Activist Journalism

Contemporary discourse around constructive journalism should be understood as a resurgence, rather than the invention, of journalism putting forth solutions to problems that ail the society. Although initiatives such as the Constructive Journalism Project and Solutions Journalism Network are new, the term and concept of constructive journalism are not. Krüger (2017) traces constructive journalism back to a 1948 New York-based news service called *Good News Bulletin* (406) which focused on "successful projects and positive alternatives" to problem-focused coverage (407).

A second early usage of the term "constructive journalism" arose in 1959, with the publication of David Chalmers' "The muckrakers and the growth of corporate power: A study in constructive journalism" as one of its early uses. In his study, Chalmers provides evidence that American muckraking journalists of the Progressive era at the turn of the twentieth century (such as Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens) enacted a constructive role, in the sense that they sought to inform the citizenry of corruption, and also offered specific "ideas as to what should be done to enable the people to reassert control over their own affairs" (305). Muckraking journalists, like contemporary constructive journalists, did not abandon an informational role of the press and instead sought to enrich this role by suggesting solutions to the societal ills they exposed (304–305).

The muckrakers are a prime example of how, in practice, normative roles of the press overlap and intersect: classically understood as enacting a monitorial role, these journalists also covered solutions with an endorsement of social progress beyond detached observation. In this regard, muckraking journalists enacted both a monitorial role and a constructive role. A constructive role captures the space between the extremes of an activist-journalist and an objective-journalist. This role provides a vocabulary that is often missing in discourse about alternative journalisms, as journalists may be classified at either extreme when their commitments are better understood as a continuum (aligned with Carpentier 2005; Hanitzsch 2007).

Constructive journalism, which McIntyre and Sobel (2017) call an "umbrella term" (5), has precedents in public journalism, peace journalism, and activist journalism. These are all "alternative" forms of journalism in the sense that they diverge from dominant mainstream media that espouses a monitorial, impartial role for the press. For instance, public journalism sought to reconfigure the relationship between journalists and the communities they cover, and viewed journalists' attachment to these communities as a boon for coverage rather than a conflict of interest. Public journalism called into question the taken-for-granted necessity of journalistic impartiality, and called for journalists to serve as facilitators of public discourse through venues such as roundtables about issues like race relations in American towns (Rosen 1999). Peace journalism, on the other hand, proposed new ways of covering conflict with an emphasis on reconciliation and the human cost of war, rather than focusing on violence and victory/loss frames (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005). Finally, activist journalism created venues for social movements and disenfranchised groups to publicize their efforts and demands, and attempted to rally support for a specific political agenda (Ostertag 2006). Each of these movements within journalism can be grouped together as what Carpentier (2005) usefully calls "reform projects" (206–207) which laid the groundwork for contemporary constructive journalism and its ideal of social progress.

Carpentier (2005) argues that reform projects such as public journalism go beyond impartiality and eschew "a too absolutist interpretation of neutrality … it is explicitly stated that neutrality does not apply when universal values, such as peace, democracy, human rights, (gender and racial) equality, (social) progress and national liberation, are at stake" (206–207). Journalists range from "advocate-campaigners" to "objective" reporters on Carpentier's axis.

Specific to public journalism, Carpentier (2005) notes that proponents of public journalism took a "similar position in its plea for reviving the public debate, for centralizing democracy as a universal value and for a tighter link between community and journalism" (207). However, due to public journalism's emphasis on journalists as managers of debate who did not endorse or attempt to narrow the focus to particular solutions, public journalism may be constructive or may be more facilitative as they convene conversations about problems without necessarily arriving at or putting forth solutions about these problems. A challenge with pinning down the boundaries of a "reform project" such as public journalism lies in its intentionally amorphous nature as an experiment that became a scholarly object of study but has never had cohesion or a clear starting point and ending point (Voakes 2004).

Like past reform projects, constructive journalism (including solutions journalism) resist easy classification in binaries such as "objective" versus "activist" (as it is neither, exclusively) or "mainstream" versus "alternative" (since it is an alternative approach found within mainstream publications), or even "old" versus "new," given constructive journalism's history dating back to 1948—which points to the need to explicate its normative role in order to account for solution-focused journalistic practices and the diversity of ideals within journalism(s).

Furthermore, in some cases, public journalism and activist journalism may, respectively, be best classified as facilitative and radical—but could also simultaneously enact a constructive role. Nothing precludes public journalism or activist journalism from offering solutions—though this is not their definitional quality. That said, the borders of "reform projects" should not be drawn too firmly, since part of the point of reform projects such as public journalism was to experiment with a more fluid vision of how journalism can serve its communities (Voakes 2004), which means that public journalism projects may, by design, span multiple normative categories.

Peace journalism, on the other hand, is more squarely an example of constructive journalism due to its solutions orientation. Krüger (2017) has argued that peace journalism is an example of constructive journalism since, in contrast to "war and violence journalism," it is not "victory-oriented," but rather "solution-oriented" and sought reconciliation (406). The same could be said of public journalism and activist journalism, when these movements offered solutions coverage. Each may enact a constructive role, in which journalism's aim and purpose are not simply to inform people of problems (which is the extent of a monitorial press) but to cover and offer concrete ways to address these problems. The defining feature of constructive journalism is that it offers solutions.

Contemporary constructive journalism, like its precedents, has attracted scrutiny for departing from prevailing norms in an Anglo-Saxon context that position journalism as staunchly monitorial. Moving beyond a monitorial role by suggesting, to varying degrees, that social progress is desirable and realizable, precedents and contemporary manifestations of constructive journalism all embrace journalism's capacity to contribute to social progress. Some critics have argued that these forms of journalism cannot be

defensibly categorized as journalism because they shift the craft of journalism too far afield from conveying impartial information (Loyn 2007). The metadiscourse we analyze indicates that many leaders of these movements are cognizant of these potential criticisms and attempt to combat them by distancing constructive journalism from advocacy. Yet doing so belies what distinguishes constructive journalism from monitorial journalism, and rhetorically muddles the underlying ideal of social progress that constructive journalism, at its core, aspires to advance.

Journalists who enact a constructive role become more than bearers of bad news, as they shift focus and attention to the prospect for (realizable) social change, by documenting and developing solutions to ongoing social problems. The potential for journalism to enact a constructive role has been realized throughout the twentieth century, through precedents in often-unstructured experiments, alternative approaches, and movements such as public journalism, peace journalism, and activist journalism. These three journalism movements are not the only predecessors of constructive journalism but are the most important in the sense that contemporary constructive journalism incorporates and echoes the logic and approach of these prior movements. Journalism scholarship has paid particular attention to these movements since in each case, these journalism movements challenged and shifted the boundaries of journalism from the perspective of scholars and practitioners alike. In each case, practitioners were unwilling to define themselves as not engaging in journalism and insisted that their approach to journalism was both defensible and desirable. The same holds in contemporary constructive journalism metadiscourse, which is the focus of the following sections.

Research Questions

To examine the boundaries of constructive journalism and solutions journalism, the following empirical study analyzes metadiscourse around solutions journalism and constructive journalism to answer three main research questions: First, how are solutions journalism and contemporary constructive journalism situated on the continuum of change in journalism's boundaries? Second, what are the normative roles that the metajournalistic discourse suggests for solutions and constructive journalism? Third, where does the metajournalistic discourse locate solutions journalism and contemporary constructive journalism in relation to other types of constructive journalism (such as public journalism, peace journalism, and activist journalism)?

Data and Methods

The data for analyzing the metadiscourse were gathered from online materials about constructive journalism and solutions journalism. We followed metadiscourse in prominent news outlets and examined the informational materials on the websites of the organizations promoting solutions journalism and constructive journalism, with a goal to create a comprehensive collection of solutions journalism and constructive journalism. A list of materials analyzed is provided in the Appendix. The data also include news articles and opinion-editorials discussing solutions journalism and/or constructive journalism published by news outlets such as the *New York Times* and the American Press Institute. News articles were gathered through a Google search for articles for constructive journalism and solutions journalism and following the two prominent Twitter feeds about solutions

journalism and constructive journalism from June 2016 until October 2017. The twitter handle @soljourno belongs to the Solutions Journalism Network and @ConstructiveVox is a handle of a nonprofit organization National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) advocating for constructive journalism. On these Twitter handles, 16 months of Tweets were analyzed for context.

Altogether, the metajournalistic discourse was analyzed from 16 articles and websites. Of the 16 units of data, 5 were pages from nonprofit organizations' (NVCO,[2] Solutions Journalism Network,[3] and Constructive Journalism Project[4]) websites, and the rest were blog posts published on newspapers' and other publications' websites. The data were gathered with a goal to capture the most prominent journalistic metadiscourse about constructive journalism and solutions journalism.

The materials were analyzed by using an analytical framework containing the following aspects: (i) The definition of solutions journalism/constructive journalism, (ii) motivation for solutions journalism/constructive journalism, (iii) solutions journalism/constructive journalism's relationship with collective action and mobilizing, (iv) methods for applying solutions journalism/constructive journalism in journalism practice, (v) challenges in implementing solutions journalism/constructive journalism in journalism practice, (vi) solutions journalism/constructive journalism's relationship with other forms of journalism, e.g. public journalism and civic journalism, (vii) solutions journalism/constructive journalism and journalistic norms, and (viii) solutions journalism/constructive journalism and normative roles of journalism. These eight aspects were chosen for the analytical framework because examining them provides insight into the boundaries of constructive journalism and solutions journalism. Using the analytical framework above, we categorized metadiscourse through a round of coding, and then connected the results to the theoretical framework about the normative roles of journalism and how constructive journalism differs from traditional norms and practices.

Findings

Defining Solutions Journalism and Constructive Journalism

Metajournalistic discourse about solutions journalism and constructive journalism defines both as regular "rigorous journalism," which adheres to traditional journalistic norms and practices but has a new focus: covering actionable solutions, rather than exclusively covering problems. Both solutions journalism and constructive journalism are defined as a method that offers additional tools for journalists to conduct their reporting, which enables journalists to showcase solutions that can have a positive effect on society. The strong alignment of both solutions journalism and constructive journalism as a parallel form and practice to traditional journalism is illuminated in a quotation from a co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network, Courtney Martin, as cited in an article published by Journalism.co.uk:[5]

> "[S]olutions journalism is about what journalism has always been about: informing and empowering people." What's different, she suggests, is that "we're just asking journalists to do that in a more complete way, by investigating what has worked just as rigorously and relentlessly as what hasn't."

Similarly, in another article, SJN co-founder David Bornstein in the American Press Institute[6] emphasizes the similarity between solutions journalism and traditional reporting, with an

addition of "examples of people working toward solutions." As the quotes illustrate, solutions journalism is rigorous and compelling reporting and it is investigative and explanatory in nature, similar to traditional reporting with same qualities. The objects of reporting are solutions to social issues and people working towards these solutions. In a parallel vein, constructive journalism is defined very similarly to solutions journalism and very closely to traditional journalism on the website of the Constructive Journalism Project,[7] as the following quote illustrates: "Rigorous, compelling reporting that includes positive and solution-focused elements to empower audiences and present a fuller picture of truth, while upholding journalism's core functions and ethics."

In solutions and constructive journalism, journalistic authority is channeled to expose solutions to the public and legitimized by placing them on the journalistic agenda. The same apparatus of journalistic practices and norms that traditional journalism uses to expose problems is here harnessed to cover solutions. Solutions and constructive journalism hence call for reinterpreting news values, by shifting focus from problems to solutions.

Constructive journalism and solutions journalism suggest a news value of social action as grounds for newsworthiness. Moving away from sensationalism, conflict frames, and negativity as criteria for newsworthiness (news values discussed in Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2001), constructive journalism and solutions journalism treat initiatives to address problems as a central news value that makes an issue newsworthy. A justification for the shift of focus in news values is the increasing amount of social innovations that are designed to tackle social issues, as reflected in a blog post published in the *Fixes* blog in the *New York Times*' Opinionater section[8] by Bornstein, who lists a host of domains for social innovations, including environmental improvement and human rights advocacy.

Motivating Solutions Journalism and Constructive Journalism

In the metadiscourse, the motivations for employing solutions journalism and constructive journalism are very similar: to improve society and to do better journalism. These goals are reflected in an interview with Cathrine Gyldensted, a Director of Constructive Journalism in the University of Windesheim in the Netherlands, published in an article on the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers' website:[9] "It strengthens coverage in terms of providing a more accurate portrayal of the world; engaging audiences more effectively; and holding power to account by asking them to solve, collaborate, seek a civil debate—instead of usual conflicts, disagreeing, polarization."

The logic in the metadiscourse is that when journalism showcases examples of solving social issues successfully, that can accelerate social progress: institutions can be improved, social inequalities resolved, and social justice strengthened. In the metajournalistic discourse, providing solutions becomes a positive, healing force in the society, as Solutions Journalism Network co-founder Bornstein articulates when quoted in an American Press Institute's article:[10]

> The feedback system known as journalism is based on the idea that the way to improve society is to show people where we're going wrong. [...] Misdeeds often persist because people are ignorant of ways to address them more successfully.

In the metadiscourse, journalism serves society by presenting solutions, which authorities and the public can formulate opinions about and act upon, rather than only highlighting a social problem.

The metadiscourse suggests new aspects in the role of journalism within constructive journalism and solutions journalism that moves beyond a monitorial role: journalism aims to represent examples of effective problem-solving and thus act as a positive force in society. This approach is illustrated in the following quote from the Constructive Journalism Project website in the FAQ section[11] addressing the question of what "constructive" means in constructive journalism:

> Holding an awareness that media shapes society and, in response, choosing to address issues and events through a lens that is more positive or solution-focused than a traditional negative approach. Constructive journalism is based on looking at a "wellbeing model" of the world, rather than a "disease model"—identifying possibilities, growth and strengths, not only focusing on difficulty and loss.

"Constructive" in constructive journalism is defined as productive, positive approach to problems. By calling for a more active coverage of solutions, the metajournalistic discourse shifts from a watchdog function of identifying problems to covering the (right) solutions. Solutions journalism and constructive journalism claim to bring solutions to light, and then it is the responsibility of authorities and the public to choose the right solutions to fix the problems.

Moreover, the metadiscourse claims that shifting the focus from problems to solutions strengthens democracy. Providing solutions to vexing issues strengthens active citizenship through public discourse: "By exposing people to what works—and demystifying the how's and why's—solutions journalism can alter their sense of what's possible, fostering a more productive public discourse and catalytic citizenship." As the above citation from an interview with Bornstein published by the American Press Institute shows,[12] focusing on problems leads to disengaged and passive citizenry as result from "news fatigue,"[13] which refers to a reader's tiredness from reading negative news. In contrast, exposing the public to solutions will lead to a more productive public discourse and active citizenship. This, solutions journalism metadiscourse suggests, will strengthen democracy.

Audience engagement also motivates solutions journalism and constructive journalism in the metajournalistic discourse. The positive approach (of covering solutions) is supposed to attract, engage, and empower readers, leaving them with an impression that problems can be fixed and the world can be made a better place, as indicated on the NVCO's page titled "What Is Constructive Journalism":[14] "Other studies have indicated that audiences feel better informed and more optimistic after reading solutions stories, more likely to seek out news outlets that provide constructive coverage and are far more likely to share stories that stir positive feelings."

Moreover, focusing on solutions claims to potentially engage particularly important and elusive audience groups such as young people.

Both solutions and constructive journalism want to distinguish themselves from other forms of alternative journalism, namely public journalism, citizen journalism, and civic journalism. These are defined in the metajournalistic discourse as "movements," whereas solutions and constructive journalism are defined as "tools for professional journalists," as the following citation from an interview with a Solutions Journalism Network co-founder Bornstein by the American Press Institute[15] shows:

> How is solutions journalism different from advocacy journalism, or promoting particular outcomes, one of the ideas that was controversial in the civic journalism movement in

the 1990s? Solutions journalism is simply critical and clear-eyed reporting that investigates and explains existing credible responses to social problems. It is explicitly not about trying to promote ideas or pick winners or the best models for addressing problems.

Similarly, the *Seattle Times* Education Lab[16] distances solutions journalism from advocacy:

Solutions journalism is not about advocating for or proposing particular models, organizations or ideas. The [Seattle] Times will not recommend one education solution or another on its news pages; its role is to critically examine potential solutions that could provide powerful insights that change the way people consider our region's education challenges.

Where constructive journalism and solutions journalism fall on a continuum of advocacy and journalism varies by story, but the metadiscourse about these approaches position both forms of journalism farther from "overt" advocacy and closer to "subtle" advocacy (Fisher 2016, 723)—despite their shared aims to showcase concrete possibilities for social progress.

Journalistic Norms in Solutions and Constructive Journalism

Metajournalistic discourse surrounding solutions journalism and constructive journalism claims to strengthen—not dismantle or challenge—traditional journalistic norms. Solutions and constructive journalism, proponents argue, enable journalists to better reach the ideals of accuracy—the truth—in journalism, as an interview with Bornstein in the American Press Institute[17] shows:

[W]ithout concerted efforts, journalists will miss lots of quiet stories that have the potential to inject new information into the conversation about how to address problems. That's why we feel that it's useful to have a framework that explains why solutions journalism is not only legitimate, but necessary—if we want the news to be accurate and comprehensive.

In the metadiscourse, solutions journalism and constructive journalism claim to provide "rigorous," "accurate," "representative," and "comprehensive" news coverage. These claims reflect attempts to insulate solutions and constructive journalism from accusations of bias. Emphasizing the implementation of journalistic norms echo attempts to legitimize solutions journalism and constructive journalism as "trustworthy" and "necessary" forms of journalism, as reflected in the following quote from a blog post published in the New York Times' Fixes blog in the Opinionater section[18] by Bornstein:

The majority of publishers, editors and reporters contend that the primary role of journalism is to expose wrongdoing. The general public also supports this function. But, today, along with all the other changes in media, it's fair to say that what is sometimes called solutions journalism should be seen as a legitimate branch of reporting—one that needs to be held to the same standards of accuracy and professionalism as other forms.

Moreover, solutions journalism metadiscourse contains strong language to rebut critiques that solutions journalism is not "real" journalism. The metadiscourse equates journalistic authority with objectivity, even while simultaneously advancing a vision of journalism as better serving the public through a deliberate focus on solutions (that move beyond objectivity by offering a path forward). By situating solutions journalism and constructive journalism as compatible with practices of news reporting for informational purposes,

the barriers to engaging in solutions journalism and constructive journalism seem low—but the unique benefits of these approaches of journalism begin to seem dim as well, as their novelty is submerged within reassurances that these approaches are consistent with traditional and dominant definitions of journalism.

However, interestingly, there are some cracks in the strict adherence to objectivity in the metajournalistic discourse. Some proponents of constructive journalism, although a minority, acknowledge the socially constructive role of journalism and the unreachable ideal of objectivity. One of them is Cathrine Gyldensted, a Director of Constructive Journalism in the University of Windesheim in the Netherlands, who says in an article on the website of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers:[19] "Stop being blind: we're not mirroring the world, we are moving the world." This is a rare voice among otherwise unified chorus repeating the persistence of objectivity in solutions journalism and constructive journalism.

In an American context, and particularly in a moment when trust in the American press is drifting lower (Feldman and Swanson 2016), it is perhaps unsurprising that journalists remain reluctant to acknowledge commitments, even in the context of constructive journalism—other than declaring a commitment to provide a comprehensive picture of the world so that audiences can act on the information as they see fit. Yet embedded within solutions journalism's metadiscourse is a judgment of what "comprehensiveness" means. Solutions journalism uses solutions as a news value for why an issue deserves coverage—rather than, for instance, criteria such as the number of people affected (regardless of whether there are viable solutions to cover). How solutions journalism defines "comprehensiveness" reveals its politics: these politics do not mean that solutions journalism is no longer journalism, particularly as the boundaries of journalism expand (Carlson 2015a, 2015b), but instead suggests that solutions journalism makes a stronger claim about what a good society looks like than its metadiscourse acknowledges.

Journalistic Practices in Solutions and Constructive Journalism

The metadiscourse claims that the rather lofty goals of solutions and constructive journalism are reachable by deploying traditional journalistic practices—as long as they are "rigorous journalism," as stated several times in the metadiscourse. There are no substantial differences in sourcing, data gathering, analysis, or other parts of the journalistic process—as long as the solution is covered objectively and accurately, without bias. This guideline is reflected in a citation of International Journalists Network's article[20] about solutions journalism:

> [S]olutions stories are concerned with the results of solutions they report on—but these stories are careful not to make overstatements, or simply concentrate on the outstanding qualities of the people they cover. A good piece of solutions journalism, according to Rosenberg, focuses on the work done to solve the problem and explains how it was made possible. It provides real, data-based evidence of the work's results, and produces tangible insights so the reader understands how the solution can be replicated.

Solutions journalism, then, is supposed to be evidence-based, unbiased reporting focused on the solution rather than people doing the work, following traditional journalistic norms and practices.

The metajournalistic discourse about solutions journalism and constructive journalism reveals a contradictory approach to journalism's role in collective action. On one hand, there is a clear line that prohibits journalism from mobilizing social change by publishing calls for action, or even recommending solutions, as a Solutions Journalism Network co-founder David Bornstein states in the American Press Institute's article:[21] "They [journalists] do not proclaim what 'should' be done. And they do not exhort readers to take specific action—such as signing a petition or donating money."

Solutions journalism thus situates itself simultaneously as a positive force in the society and as a neutral actor: by showcasing solutions, it can contribute to social change, but also claim to be autonomous and impartial.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the metadiscourse surrounding solutions journalism and constructive journalism. In the metajournalistic discourse, both types of journalism claim to follow the traditional journalistic practices and norms in the most rigorous manner, but with a new dimension in reporting, which shifts the focus from covering social problems to also exposing actionable solutions to these problems. In so doing, solutions journalism and constructive journalism argue that they retain journalistic ideals of objectivity and accuracy by creating a more comprehensive and representative picture of the world; a world in which journalism shoulders the responsibility of bringing effective solutions to public discourse.

The analysis of the metajournalistic discourse shows that on the one hand, solutions journalism and constructive journalism justify their existence by the intensified need to solve vexing social issues, such as homelessness and famine, and by the increasing number of social innovations to address these problems. Covering actionable solutions is, according to the metajournalistic discourse, key to apply those social innovations for social good. On the other hand, solutions journalism and constructive journalism distance themselves from being proponents for social good, by claiming to only objectively cover solutions without preferences or values affecting the selection of those solutions, and do not acknowledge journalism's role in agenda-setting: solutions that are covered in news are more easily legitimized and normalized in the public discourse. Moreover, while both types of journalism are deemed, largely by their advocates, to advance common good by improving society with actionable solution coverage, solutions journalism, and constructive journalism strategically attempt to distance themselves from other types of journalisms with a similar goal, such as advocacy journalism, civic journalism, and public journalism, in an effort to lay claim to the rigor of objective reporting despite an ideal of social progress and latent orienting principle of hope.

The aspirations of solutions and constructive journalism in metajournalistic discourse suggest a new role of journalism—a role in which journalism takes a responsibility for being a constructive force in the society as what Krüger (2017) characterizes as a "change-agent" (403), rather than just that of a detached observer. While advocates for solutions journalism and constructive journalism emphasize the need for constructive impact, they hesitate to acknowledge the shift from a largely passive monitorial role to a more active, constructive one.

The struggle over normative boundaries is a familiar one in journalism, and have regularly led to contradictions and dueling ideals. For instance, American journalists—

particularly investigative reporters—have sought to "objectively" spark "righteous indigna-tion" about wrongdoing, which James Ettema and Theodore Glasser (1998) have argued is a contradiction in terms. When objectivity is understood as the absence of commitments, then stirring indignation should have no place in journalism—yet, indignation has been a mainstay of investigative reporting for over a century (61). In Anglo-Saxon settings, alternative forms of journalism such as peace journalism have also attracted skepticism about whether they can defensibly claim to be "journalism" when moving beyond a moni-torial role (Kempf 2007; Loyn 2007).

The normative conundrums in the metajournalistic discourse reflect the pressure to extend the boundaries of journalism. These boundaries are in a constant change raise important normative questions: What constitutes good journalism? What should the ideals and practices of good journalism be? If a constructive role is deemed desirable in journalism, based on a conception of the press as having a social responsibility to improve society, what practices that would fulfill the demands of this role for fostering and calling for social improvements?

The metadiscourse surrounding constructive journalism and solutions journalism suggests that, despite being hesitant to claim it, journalists are advancing an overarching claim that progressivism is good for society. Rather than maintaining impartial detachment about the future, constructive journalism and solutions journalism actively seek out and provide evidence that perennial problems need not persist, which moves their practitioners beyond simply providing complete information. The information they provide, in other words, seeks to move society in the direction of a more egalitarian future, which loads what William Rehg (1997) has called "a theory of the good" (124). Yet, the metadiscourse cloaks journalism's constructive role by purporting that constructive journalism is primarily an enhanced monitorial press, which minimizes its potential to foster social progress.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

NOTES

1. In some settings, journalism enacting a constructive role may not be construed as a movement worthy of scrutiny but instead as the norm. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) have pointed out, national context and the presence of corporatism shapes journalistic norms (26–33).
2. https://www.ncvo.org.uk/.
3. https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/.
4. https://www.constructivejournalism.org/.
5. https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-commentary/fresh-approaches-to-the-role-of-journalism-at-local-titles-in-the-pacific-northwest/s6/a711249/.
6. https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.
7. https://www.constructivejournalism.org/about/.
8. https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/why-solutions-journalism-matters-too/?_r=0by.
9. https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2016/01/14/is-constructive-journalism-finally-taking-off.

10.   https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.

11.   https://www.constructivejournalism.org/faq/.

12.   https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.

13.   https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/why-solutions-journalism-matters-too/.

14.   https://www.ncvo.org.uk/guide-to-constructive-journalism.

15.   https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.

16.   https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab-about/#education-lab-faq.

17.   https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.

18.   https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/why-solutions-journalism-matters-too/?_r=0by).

19.   https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2016/01/14/is-constructive-journalism-finally-taking-off.

20.   https://ijnet.org/en/blog/what-makes-successful-solutions-journalism-story.

21.   https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/.

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Appendix

List of data with links to the websites.

- Constructive Journalism Project
  https://www.constructivejournalism.org/about/
- The Express Guide to Constructive Journalism
  https://www.ncvo.org.uk/guide-to-constructive-journalism
- Fresh approaches to the role of journalism at local titles in the Pacific Northwest by Journalism.co.uk
  https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-commentary/fresh-approaches-to-the-role-of-journalism-at-local-titles-in-the-pacific-northwest/s6/a711249/
- How solutions journalism makes your reporting stronger by the Poynter Institute
  https://www.poynter.org/news/how-solutions-journalism-makes-your-reporting-stronger
- Is constructive journalism finally taking off? By WAN-IFRA, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers
  https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2016/01/14/is-constructive-journalism-finally-taking-off
- Is Solutions Journalism the Solution? By the Nieman Reports
  http://niemanreports.org/articles/is-solutions-journalism-the-solution/
- Remix: How and Why to Teach Solutions Journalism by MediaShift
  http://mediashift.org/2016/09/remix-teach-solutions-journalism/
- NCVO: Introducing Constructive Voices
  https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/01/18/introducing-constructive-voices/
- Reporting the whole story: 9 good questions with David Bornstein of Solutions Journalism Network by the American Press Institute https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/good-questions/moving-toward-whole-story-9-good-questions-david-bornstein-solutions-journalism-network/
- Seattle Times Education Lab
  https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab-about/
- Solutions Journalism Network
  https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/
- Up for Debate: Why We Need Solutions Journalism by Forbes
  https://www.forbes.com/sites/skollworldforum/2012/11/29/up-for-debate-why-we-need-solutions-journalism/#20988a4b5b75
- What makes a successful solutions journalism story? By IJNet, International Journalists' Network
  https://ijnet.org/en/blog/what-makes-successful-solutions-journalism-story
- When Reportage Turns to Cynicism by David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg in the New York Times
  https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/when-reportage-turns-to-cynicism.html
- "What now" For News? By Huffington Post
  http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/giselle-green/positive-news-constructive-journalism_b_9296374.html
- Why "Solutions Journalism" Matters, Too by the New York Times
  https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/why-solutions-journalism-matters-too/?_r=0

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