

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 1, April 15, 2016: Afternoon Session 3:30-4:45 p.m.

Journalists as Activists and Activists as Journalists: Has the internet blurred the line between journalism and activism/advocacy?

Chair & Presenter: Pam Fine, President of **ASNE** and Knight Chair for News, Leadership and Community at **University of Kansas**

- **Emma Daly**, Director, Communications, **Human Rights Watch**
- **Daniela Gerson**, Community Engagement Editor, **Los Angeles Times**
- **Jake Horowitz**, Founder, **Mic.com**
- **Joel Simon**, Executive Director, **Committee to Protect Journalism**

Emma Daly: Hello. Thank you so much for having me. Like the panel before, I'm going to be more old school. I can't pace and hold a microphone and notes at the same time, I'm afraid. So I'm going to talk about Human Rights Watch, which is absolutely an advocacy organization. That's how we think of ourselves. But we are all about bearing witness in order to change lives.

We are 420 people working in 90 countries, and our role is to investigate human rights violations, to expose them as widely as possible, and to bring about the pressure on governments to stop the killing or the torture or the discrimination, to free the press, to treat people with respect.

So having said that we are very firmly an activist organization, I want to show you a little film about how we work in the field.

[Video plays.]

Woman: We were here as this boat arrived with about 60 people, many families, many young children.

Man: When did you leave Jakarta?

Woman: How many days since they've had the medicine?

Man: This is a rocket struck in Danyette[?], and as you can see, in a populated area.

Boy: [foreign language]

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Woman: [foreign language]

Man: [foreign language]

Woman: The spiritual home of Boko Haram is just a stone's throw from here. This school was the very first reported school attack.

Woman: In Bangladesh, there is this perfect storm, where natural disasters really fuel the cycle of child marriage. Pretty much every girl we spoke to said that their lives had been destroyed by marrying so young.

Woman: These images were smuggled out of Syria by a military defector, code named Caesar. They are said to be of some of the thousands who have died in government custody there. Human Rights Watch has now published a report called If the Dead Could Speak.

Man: [foreign language]

Woman: Can you tell how far away was the person who shot him?

Man: Very close.

Man: For years, paramilitaries and gangs in Bona Ventura have been murdering people and burying them in hidden graves in different areas of the city.

Woman: There are 30 people who are currently living in this institution—29 of whom are chained.

Man: We're here in one of the informal camp settlements for Syrian refugees in Bekaa Valley.

Man: There are around 200,000 Syrian children who are not getting any education in Lebanon at this stage.

[End of video.]

So, as you can see, on the ground, Human Rights Watch researchers really look a lot like journalists. We gather information from witnesses and survivors and law enforcement, government officials, medics, perpetrators, even. And this fact finding is the basis of everything that we do. We ask questions of as many people as we can. We cross-check. We verify. When necessary, we correct. We try to get the government's version of events. It's not always possible. We have a code of conduct about how we work, especially about how we interview vulnerable or traumatized people. And as

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

you see, we travel with photographers and videographers, because that's all of our footage. We want the visual content to meet the same standards as our words.

So, what do we do with all this information that we gather? We produce long reports. We focus a lot of forgotten stories, places like the Central African Republic, a place so obscure that most of us couldn't find it on the map, despite its name. This is one of several reports we've done on the Central African Republic, a product of months and months in the field doing dozens of interviews, traveling widely in a place with almost no infrastructure. There aren't a lot of news outlets today that can afford that kind of an investment in the story.

Of course, because of the internet, you know, we're a media company. We publish and broadcast our stories in print, you know, in multimedia, with stills on our sites. We obviously use social media; in particular, Twitter, because we're really thinking a lot about you.

We have more than 200 Human Rights Watch accounts. We have more than three-million Twitter followers in English and another quarter-of-a-million in multiple other languages. So we do reach the general public, but Twitter, in particular, we're really thinking about reaching journalists and policymakers who are critical audiences for us. We also, of course, use Facebook and Instagram and Tumblr and YouTube and Medium.

We're a news source for Google, and how we wish we were a Snapchat Discover partner; although, if we were, we'd then have to fundraise to hire somebody to produce the content. But, you know, it'd probably be worth it. We think it would be a good investment at this point.

But still, despite the fact that we act like a media company, distributing content is also critical to us through the medium of press releases, because, for us, journalists are still a really important part of how we make change and how we bring pressure on those who are committing human rights abuses.

There's sort of this life cycle that we're all a part of. A story breaks, you cover it. We often go into this kind of forensic journalism mode where we really spend a lot of time in a place and uncovering a story. We are producing video, for example, which we're also distributing to media companies for you to use. Breaking news happens. You report it. We go in and report it further. Then you come back and report it again.

And all of this cycle of reporting, and our reporting, and more headlines really increases the pressure on government. It raises the cost of the abuse, so that when our advocates go into the corridors of power to try to persuade people to stop violating people's rights, we're more likely to be heard.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Because we're a global organization, we do this in multiple languages, and we're trying to reach journalists in many, many places.

Sometimes when we work like this, we actually achieve impact. In the case of the Central African Republic, where there was really horrendous violence taking place, it was turning into a brutal sectarian civil war that really very few people were paying attention to. We were able to make a difference. In the Central African Republic, Twitter was very important. We were trying to get attention to the story. But obviously if you search on Twitter for CAR, you are not going to find many human rights stories. So we came up with the hashtag CAR-Crisis, which then got adopted and has been very widely used over the past couple of years. We really were able to put this story on the sort of media map. And that's why Samantha Powell went to the Central African Republic, the Security Council went, and why in the end the UN Security Council decided to deploy peacekeepers there.

So we start with gathering the facts on the ground and exposing them as widely as we can. But to make a real difference, we still need the media as well, because even as we reach an engaged public, we still rely on all of you to cover our stories for the extra credibility you can give us as well as for the audiences you reach. From my perspective, I like nothing better than you re-reporting the stories that we've done and coming to the same conclusions, or reporting out a lead that we've given you, even if you don't credit us, as sometimes happens. [some laughter]

And by the way, when we distribute a video, we give you a cut version which is branded, and then we give you a clip reel, some of which is branded and some of which isn't. And I'm always surprised by the media companies who choose to use our content without actually crediting us, and therefore, without telling their audience where they're getting the footage from.

So I would say we produce journalism, but we're not journalists. We don't stop at the story. We push recommendations to try to fix the problem. We've got the resources and the commitment to go deep and to stick around, which I think is good for all of us.

I think that ultimately the successful formula is that your breaking news and our forensic journalism that's then amplified by the mainstream media is what leads to impact and what changes people's lives.

Thanks.

[Applause.]

Daniela Gerson: Hi. Thank you very much for having me. It's really exciting to be part of this panel. And in the past 12 hours or so, when I've had an opportunity to really think through this topic, I've been thinking about my role, which is a new role at the L.A. Times. It was only created about

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

seven or eight months ago when I started there. And my role is to connect readers to the L.A. Times, to find ways for readers to contribute, or at least the role as I understand my role, and it's also to connect our stories better to readers.

And to what Emma was saying, in terms of them being 100% an advocacy organization, we're 100% a journalism organization. We're committed to fair representation. We're committed to accurate reporting, but we're also committed to making sure that our readers are represented in that.

I also wanted to say that, you know, I feel like I'm going to be building a lot on what the last panel presented. And someone tweeted that it was like following the Rolling Stones. And I do feel that some of what I'm saying built on what they said.

So I'm going to start by telling you a little bit about my background. I started, as I'm sure many of you did, at a daily newspaper in New York City, which had very limited web coverage at the time. We put out a.... It was behind a paywall. It was called The New York Sun. And I reported on social issues, mostly immigration issues. With one person—myself—kind of holding the microphone or the notebook, it was fairly easy to ensure that I was showing two sides of a story. And that changed.

And here's where I'm going to channel a little bit the person who I am replacing here. And I would say that that did change with this idea of the barriers to entry being reduced and people being able to publish in different ways. And I think that's a change that's been very exciting for us as reporters. It brings in various different perspectives. And when bringing in these perspectives, it also brings questions about advocacy in your reporting.

I was looking up a report that Richard Tofel did about ProPublica and the difference between advocacy and nonprofit journalism. One thing he said was that a journalist starts with a question usually, and an advocate usually with a perspective or an issue they want to get across. Well, many of the people who I've worked with in the past in some of these different community-based projects—I'll talk about them in a second—really did have very evident perspectives they wanted to get across.

So I went from being at a daily newspaper in New York to doing some other reporting. And then I wanted to see how we could work with a community to report their stories. There was a community in suburban Los Angeles called Alhambra. And Alhambra like many communities across the country had seen a sharp reduction in local news. They'd had, I think, like, eight newspapers with the name Alhambra in them starting in the 1800's, but the last one was in the 1900's—sorry—in [the] 1990's. And without that, you did have an increase in Chinese news coverage, but we found that many of the policy leaders couldn't read in Chinese, and they weren't having it translated. And we found that there was no.... And I worked on this project with the

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

University of Southern California. We worked with a research team. And we looked at how we could work with community members to report their own stories.

One of the outcomes of it, which you'll see on the right up there, is that we developed this project with Weibo, which is a Chinese microblogging site similar to Twitter. And this really came from an advocacy type story. Let me see if I can take... No. OK. So the story [was] basically somebody who worked as a court's interpreter—he was an immigrant from China—wrote that he felt like government agencies, nonprofit organizations, could do a better job reaching out to the Chinese community in Alhambra. He suggested one way was through social media. He had a clear perspective on what needed to be changed. And like much of what we see in editorial or op-ed writing, he wrote about it. But he's also somebody who wouldn't traditionally have written. And he came to us through community contributor programs. We did training [of] residents to write their own stories.

Then the other thing we did, which moves beyond what would probably happen at the Los Angeles—or at least as of now—at the Los Angeles Times, is then we met with the police department. And there was a very forward thinking police chief in Alhambra. And he was interested in testing out some of these ideas. He'd read the article. And so he decided to launch a Weibo account. And the Weibo account, basically, initially, translated a lot of what they were doing in English on Facebook and Twitter to try and reach out to constituents, but it took off. It took off in ways that the English version never did.

And I mean, the English version is fine. It's doing just fine. But the Chinese version has had – it has more than 40,000 followers, and people were writing in questions to the police chief about, you know, "Could I leave my child home alone? What are the rules in the United States? What do I do if there's a hit-and-run?" And then we published the responses on Alhambra Source, which was the community news website we did in Chinese, Spanish, and English.

So that's one, I would say, [that] blends the lines of advocacy and journalism. And I don't know what.... I mean, here, let's do a show of hands. Is that journalism? Raise your hands. Is that advocacy? Is that both? Are you not raising your hands? [laughter] A lot of people didn't. OK. So that's what I did. That's a couple of examples from the work we did in Alhambra.

So as I said, I've been at the Los Angeles Times now for about eight months. And I wanted to give you a couple of examples of the type of projects we're doing there. Can I have a microphone? OK. Great.

So one of the things that I found very exciting about finding ways to bring in new voices is through crowdsourcing. And in the workshop yesterday, we talked a lot about this. ProPublica has done amazing work with this. We've

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

been doing work in terms of, how can we pose a question on our website, on our social media platforms, and bring in more perspectives than we would be able to do with a reporter just going out and asking questions on his or her own?

So, Porter Ranch. Who here is familiar with the Porter Ranch gas leak? So this was one of the most massive gas leaks that the United States has seen. And it was in a small, mostly sort of gated community north of Los Angeles. And for a reporter to go out, a reporter could go to community meetings, go to the traditional places, but we also asked this question on a forum on the site. We received, I think—I'm trying to remember—about 200 responses. And the responses were very diverse in nature. We asked.... I mean, we didn't make sure to ask, "Are you affiliated with an organization? Are you affiliated with a law suit?" Because we wanted to make sure that we were getting a spectrum of responses. We did. And we also verified them. We checked addresses afterward.

But what it does, I think, is that it gives you perspectives to your stories that you might not be able to get otherwise. And when reporting on social issues, is that advocacy? We're still showing both sides, but we're able to go deeper. And in some ways, I'd say, you know, if we are reporting for social change, it sort of crosses—or if we're reporting—yeah—for social change, it's crossing some of those lines.

Another thing that we have done is we have had a lot of first-person stories that may not have appeared when I started reporting originally. These are perspective pieces. They are still curated by a reporter. I still play a gatekeeper role. I still try and show both sides. But we are providing more space and also on more platforms than we would. So it's, again, this distributed content approach, where the story may run in one way on the L.A. Times site.

So, for example, "Dear Mr. Trump, going around in schools, I kept hearing from children of immigrants that they were very upset with the way in which their parents, they felt, were being portrayed." And so we went and interviewed students. We did this video. It did very well. I think it was about a million views on Facebook. And then it also ran as a story on the site.

The other piece here is a story I did on a reading group for immigrant mothers. And I did one reported story in the newspaper. And then we also did it on Medium, which provided other avenues for conversation and distribution.

The other thing, I think, is that we're learning from the Internet. I think Jake sort of mentioned this in terms of we see what's doing well. We also see what people want to talk about. We learn how to speak in a language that relates to more people. And this can be criticized at times, but we can also do serious reporting that connects with our readers. And we can also take a

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

stand about an issue that we think is important even as we do reporting that shows both sides.

And I think the other thing I would mention, this is the Oscars. Does everyone know what [happened]? Raise your hand if you know what happened with the Oscars this year. I'm just curious how international that went. OK, so most people here know. But basically all of the candidates, with the exception of one, for actor, actress, and director were white. And so this was a couple of different ways we reported on it.

The one on the right is from a slow blog. Basically, it's like a live blog that collects our stories, but a little slower, so I think we call it a slog sometimes. [laughter] But for this one, it's also a fun piece. And we were curating from elsewhere. I think the other thing the internet teaches us—and maybe this relates to advocacy—is to be a little bit more fun with our reporting, even on serious issues.

And then the other one that I thought the Texas Tribune and others brought up is, OK, our objective as reporters is to reach as many people on critical issues, but often also we're providing tools now. We're providing databases that people can use to get information that is specific to themselves. And so you can have a massive thing, like there's hundreds—I think 700 schools in LAUSD. And this database took all of the schools, and it ranked them. And in Los Angeles, which is the cultural capital of the United States, there are schools without music programs. There are schools lacking art. And this database ranks them on an A, B, C, D level.

And then we also translated it into Spanish, which was the first time in the more than 130-year history of the Los Angeles Times that we translated a database. And we wanted to do that because more than 70% of students in LAUSD are Latino. But this is an example of being able to use the internet to advocate in many ways for our readers, which also amplifies our reach.

So I'm looking forward to hearing more and discussing this with all of you. Thank you so much.

[Applause.]

Jake Horowitz: Hi, everybody. I guess I'm the millennial representation, Pam. [laughter] I'm like tweeting at Rosental from the seats.

Rosental Calmon Alves: [Inaudible.]

Jake Horowitz: OK. So really excited to be here in Austin, really excited to be part of a very distinguished panel and excited for our conversation. I thought I would get things going by doing a little audience survey about a few examples in recent memory that I think touch at this very debate about, what's the difference between journalism versus advocacy.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

So we're going to show a few examples and then just take a poll of the room and get people to raise their hands and say whether you think this is an example of journalism or advocacy. Sound good?

So here's the first example. This was obviously a photo of the three-year-old Syrian boy that was taken by a Turkish photo journalist back in September 2015, which really galvanized the world's attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. Many people said it was one of the most important photos taken in recent memory. So let's take a poll of the room. Who thought this was an example of journalism? Basically everybody. And advocacy? Some people. And maybe both? OK. Both. There's a lot of both. Great.

Here's another example. I think we heard from Univision earlier. But this was one of the memorable moments of the presidential election so far. It was an exchange between Univision anchor Jorge Ramos and obviously Republican frontrunner Donald Trump. And here's what Ramos had to say about the moment. He actually came under some attack for whether or not he was acting as a journalist or an advocate. And he said, "In the aftermath of this incident, I was accused of being an activist. That's not the case. I'm simply a journalist who asks questions. And journalists have an obligation to take a stand when it comes to racism, discrimination, corruption, public lies, dictatorships, and human rights violations." So, who thought this was a moment of journalism? A lot of people. And how about advocacy? Cool. A little bit more mixed on that one. And maybe both? Cool.

And then this is the last one, and this is a fun one. [laughter] People probably remember this moment. This is, of course, John Oliver's very famous Donald Drumpf clip. This is the most viewed John Oliver segment ever. It garnered 60-million views, or I think more than that on Facebook, 20-million on YouTube. And in the segment, of course, John Oliver called Trump a, quote, "serial liar." And he also told viewers to use the name Drumpf when referring to Trump. And here was a quote that I just pulled, which I thought would be fun to rehash. "Drumpf is much less magical. It's the sound produced when a morbidly obese pigeon flies into the window of a foreclosed Old Navy. It's the sound of a bottle store-brand root beer falling off the shelf in a gas station minimart." That was part of the segment. So, and then obviously as a part after this segment, there were Make Donald Drumpf hats, which sold like hotcakes. And there was even a Drumpfinator Chrome extension which you could download.

So, who thought this was an example of journalism? Much less people in the audience. And how about advocacy? Much more. And how about just straight comedy? [laughter] That's a new category.

OK. So, what do these examples show and why did I bring up a few of them? Well, I think what they show is that the line between journalism and advocacy is very much blurred in the digital media era that we live in. Being

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

a reporter in the social media era means having an ear to hashtags. It means paying close attention to viral causes. It also means that the nature of your Facebook feed is that the personal and the professional are blended. They are one. And it means the focus on shareability, right? So shareability by its nature is emotional. Shareability in a way is advocacy, right? You share things because you really agree with them or you really disagree with them, or you want to get your friends outraged about something, or you want to get your friends to band together against/for something. Facebook, of course, by nature of being so much about shareability, complicates the nature of what I think a modern, digital journalist is.

So all that being said, you know, reporting very much still matters. Mic, my company, exists in a distributed landscape. So we're always thinking about how our content lives across platforms. Our journalists use Facebook Live when they are going out to rallies. They use 360 Video. They are thinking about Tumblr. They are thinking about Instagram. They are thinking about Periscope and every new platform. They are thinking about Snapchat.

So living on these platforms means that, again, we live in a world where the line is very much blurry between advocacy and journalism. But I've always seen our role as asking the tough questions and reporting on important social movements, but not going the extra step of getting people to sign up for causes or sign petitions.

The reason I think that's important is that so many people who are our audience, which is 18-to-35-year-olds, the quote/unquote, "millennials," say that they are tired of partisan media. They're tired of cable news which feels like they're preaching at them. They're tired of not being able to make decisions for themselves. And so, you know, I think the line very much does matter, and our readers have told us that it matters, but I think it is complicated.

So I wanted to just close by giving one example of how we approach this very problem. And this was just actually from this week. So we debuted it on Wednesday. So we interviewed Vice President Joe Biden, who has been very active on campus sexual assaults, as some people may know. He has a big initiative called It's On Us. He's been going all over the country promoting It's On Us. And this is an issue that is obviously an important one. It's a controversial one in Hollywood and Washington. And, you know, the stat that one in four women get sexually assaulted on college campuses is alarming to probably everybody or certainly everybody in this room.

But when we went into approaching this interview, our responsibility was to our readers. And we really wanted to try to pinpoint the facts and ask the vice president tough questions about whether It's On Us is actually working. So we went in trying to hold him accountable for what the program is and if it's working and if it's effective, rather than trying to be a distribution platform for the White House for an issue that, obviously, our readers care

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

deeply about. So we didn't approach our work as advocates. We took... Our job was to take a hard look at the facts. And that's true even though we had a very distributed strategy when it came to putting this package together.

So these are just a few examples. I'd encourage everybody to go check out the video. And we had a whole series of really, really great reporting. But this all lived across social, right? This lived on Facebook. This lived on Twitter. The videos lived on Instagram [and] on all these platforms. And we were really, really... We had a lot of big discussions internally about even though this is an issue that we know most of our audience is really, really upset about, and that our strategy was living on social, we were careful to make sure that we felt like we were really asking the tough questions, rather than, as I said, just promoting the initiative. So we're really proud of that.

With that, I'm going to wrap it up. I'm really excited for the discussion. And thank you all for listening.

[Applause.]

Joel Simon: I'm Joel Simon. Thank you, Pam. It's great to be here. As Pam mentioned, I'm the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. And we defend the rights of journalists all over the world. But I'm enormously proud of that work and what we do, but I'm not really going to talk much about CPJ, because I think the most useful thing I can do is answer this question, or do the best I can in ten minutes. And I've just got a few slides that will help guide us along the way.

So here's my first question. And when I put this up here, "Who cares?" I'm not trying to be snide or sarcastic. I actually mean this literally, like, who cares about the difference between journalists and activists? Well, journalists care. They care a lot. And they like to argue about this. They care, I think, because the distinction between journalists and activists is essential to their professional identity. But here's the problem—what distinguishes journalists from activists varies tremendously, depending on an individual's perspective.

Some journalists make a distinction between objectivity and subjective reporting. They believe that journalists must be objective observers and they shouldn't be linked to a particular cause or invested in a particular outcome. Some journalists, rather, focus on a commitment to accuracy, fairness, or balance. Others believe the journalists operate within a particular ethical framework. They see themselves as the eyes and ears of the public. And others focus on where the information comes from. Is there a relationship with an established media outlet or at least a blog? Publishing something on Facebook or Twitter—the argument goes—doesn't make you a journalist.

Well, media organizations, obviously, care a lot as well, because they have to hire journalists, so they need to know what a journalist is. And for them, I think it's often linked to a certain kind of professional training in the craft or

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

a familiarity with the technical requirements of the profession. And of course, some media organizations ground their identity in a commitment to what might be called seeking the truth, no matter where it leads. And they distinguish themselves from activists who may be gathering facts and disseminating them to the public, but are doing so in order to achieve a particular outcome.

And there are other media organizations, as we know, that want people with opinions and agendas, and believe this framework is obsolete. Other media organizations, their sort of institutional culture emphasizes a commitment to the process and a commitment to accuracy. But of course there are many tabloids that bend the truth, and the people who work for these organizations still call themselves journalists.

Academics. Well, they care because they study journalism and the media. And if you can't define something, it's very hard to study it. But we've heard from Pam, you know, that you also have to see this issue from a historical and global perspective and understand how standards and perceptions evolve. And take, for example, the notion of impartiality as a defining journalistic principle, as we've just heard from Pam, this is relatively new. And it was a concept that was really developed to maximize the market share.

Why alienate part of your audience by expressing a particular political view? We know that for most of its history journalism was largely partisan, and we have to recognize this is a very American concept. In much of the world, the press takes sides and people express their political identity through the news that they consume.

Now press freedom groups, they care. And I know this because I run a press freedom group. And so I care a lot. And our mission at the Committee to Protect Journalists is obviously to defend journalists from around the world. And we embrace this mission even as we struggle sometimes to define precisely who falls within our mandate. Now we don't have some sort of rigid definition of what constitutes journalism. If you're gathering news and information and disseminating it to the public or you're engaging in fact-based commentary, you may well be a journalist, at least within our book.

We don't look at this issue in the abstract. Really, the question we're asking is whether a particular individual who's been jailed or beaten or attacked, whether that individual is a journalist. And we look at this contextually. Is this person working in a society where the media is restricted? Is there an intent to inform? Is there an intent to verify accuracy? None of these questions are determinative, but they are all part of our evaluation.

And that's why in certain instances we judge Chinese dissident bloggers to be journalists, or activists documenting human rights violations in Mexico, or groups of citizens in Syria uploading YouTube videos of the fighting.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

OK. Lawyers and judges care, but they don't care as much as you might think. Let me explain. In the United States, there was a debate about whether the press clause of the 1st Amendment confers any special rights on journalists. Most legal scholars believe it does not. Journalists are afforded special protections through shield laws, which are on the books in many states. And these allow journalists in certain circumstances to resist subpoenas and decline to reveal their sources. And that's good, of course, but there's a tradeoff.

If you're going to shield journalists, then you have to have some sort of legal definition. And to me, at least, that's uncomfortable. It doesn't feel right to let legislatures and judges determine who is and who is not a journalist, especially in such a fluid environment. The implications of granting legislatures this power is even more troubling when you look at the issue from a global perspective. Do we really want the Russian government or the Turkish government deciding who and who is not a journalist?

Now journalists for the most part don't have any special rights under international law. Like all people, they have the right to seek and receive information regardless of frontiers. Likewise, journalists who cover wars. They have the exact same rights as all other civilians, meaning they cannot be targeted. But they are not in a protected class like medical personnel.

Now, why is this? It's because of a debate held half-a-century ago that led to the revisions of the Geneva Conventions. Journalists themselves rejected making this distinction, because in order to give special status to journalists, you have to again [give] to the government some authority to make the determination about who is and who is not a journalist, and thus, eligible for this special protection. And that's a tradeoff that journalists rejected.

So as I made clear, it's never been easy to make this determination [of] who is and who is not a journalist, and the process has always been subjective and contextual. And I'm not going to belabor this point to everyone here, it's obvious, technology has made it much, much, much harder.

So let's take the case of Julian Assange. I can't recall a more fierce debate among journalists about whether somebody was or was not a part of their profession. Now my opinion, for what it's worth, is that he's not a journalist. I see him clearly on the advocacy side of the continuum. But here's the thing, I mean, that debate is interesting, but it's really a side show, because if Assange were ever prosecuted for publishing leaked documents online, then all journalists would be at risk. And this is because what journalists do, as we saw in our last panel, gathering information, making it available to the public, that's legally indistinguishable from what WikiLeaks does. So in other words, drawing a clear, bright line between journalism and activism may be tactically self-defeating.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

OK. So here's why it matters. The question of who is a journalist and an activist matters to most of us here because we fall into the categories that I just outlined in my slides. And it matters in terms of how we understand our own role and how we as a society access and understand information. These issues are very complex. And I really look forward to talking about them with my other panelists.

But in many ways, it really doesn't matter, because journalists, for the most part, do not have any special protections. And this is by design, because journalists don't want to surrender—certainly not to governments or some licensing entity—the right to define who we are and what we do. So journalists operate in a broader legal and political framework that protects freedom of expression, and they must share this space and defend it alongside activists, but also poets, playwrights, novelists, political parties, bloggers, [and] average citizens.

Making distinctions between journalists and activists is interesting, and it's certainly a valid exercise at a conference like this one, but at the end of the day, journalists are freer, safer, and more secure when the line that separates journalists from activists is just a little bit blurry.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Q&A Panel:

Pam Fine: So go ahead. We'll jump right into questions, and then if we want to talk among ourselves, we'll do that, too, but I'd really like to get other's perspectives.

Man: I have a question for Emma Daly. You talked about all the similarities between the work of your staffers and reporters, all the fact checking and so forth. What would you say is the difference? A lot of the tools are the same, but do you start with a different intent and want a different result from what you do?

Emma Daly: Well, yes. Everything we do is to try to end human rights abuses. So when we tackle a problem, you know, we start with the aim of changing it. We use journalistic tools to gather the facts that we think will make a strong case as to why, first of all, to establish that a human rights violation is actually happening, so that it can't just be dismissed as, "Oh, this is one bad apple in a police station torturing people," or, "Oh, this is a hysterical woman making it up." So we try to build a very solid case. And then we take the information. I mean, we advocate very directly. You know, we seek meetings with police chiefs, ministers, prime ministers, members of parliament, generals, corporations. Whoever it is, we try to have direct contact with them to try to persuade them to change their policy, to stop

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

doing what they are doing. We also try to think about who's influencing them. So for example, we'll go to donor governments and say to them, "You know, your funding,"—I don't know—"a police program in this country and those people are committing abuses, so you should be leaning on the government that you're funding and trying to get them to change." So I think that's really – it's in the direct advocacy afterwards where we have a very different role that I think journalists very rarely play.

Pam Fine: Joel, in our preconference communiques, you said to me, "Pam, you can't be a journalist in some countries if you're not an advocate." Can you talk about the various models or perspectives you see as a committee to protect journalists?

Joel Simon: Yeah. I mean, I think another way to frame it is, you know, if you've been a journalist in a pretty rough part of the world, you basically become an advocate for yourself, for your own stories. And the kinds of things that you might do in order to report your story or to respond when something has happened to a colleague are a form of advocacy. So you might advocate to get yourself a visa, or you might as an editor advocate to get your people a visa, and that might require meetings with the government or meeting with another government to put pressure [on them]. If something happens to somebody and they are detained, you might engage in that same kind of effort, or you might mobilize your colleagues in the media to cover it to put pressure on the government to do something about it.

So a lot of the tactics that Emma is talking about, you know, the direct engagement, she's right. When you're doing it on behalf of somebody else or some larger, broader agenda or principle, it becomes a form of advocacy. But when journalists do it on their own behalf, it's considered appropriate and legitimate within the kind of broader framework of journalism. So it's a very complicated issue. And if you operate in a country where repression and violence and intimidation are the name of the game every day, then every day you are advocating on behalf of yourself and on behalf of your colleagues to make sure that the information is able to circulate.

Emma Daly: Can I just add to that? I mean, if you're a journalist, if you're trying to be an independent journalist in a repressive country, if you're trying to be a critical voice when a government doesn't want to hear that, then almost by definition you're a human rights defender. You know, freedom of speech is a fundamental human right. And censoring and repressing and harassing journalists is a human rights issue.

Pam Fine: I want to ask the audience a question. How many of you believe the impartiality model in this country is stale? You're the ones I want to see at the microphone. Come on down. OK. So I off and on teach a news literacy course at the University of Kansas. And Joel, I noticed that one of the groups you didn't list in your groups of stakeholders were citizens.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Joel Simon: Because I don't think they care that much.

Pam Fine: OK.

Joel Simon: That's why. I mean, I would....

Pam Fine: Well, let me finish my question.

Joel Simon: Yeah.

Pam Fine: But one of the things we try very hard to do is teach students and citizens how to discern propaganda from truth or legitimate information. And I'm wondering whether you worry at all—anybody on this panel—about that issue and the concerns people have about viewers and readers seeking information that reflects their views of the world as it is, as they see it.

Joel Simon: Well, I'll start. I mean, those are two very different things. I mean, obviously, propaganda is a huge issue, and we're seeing the way that Putin's propaganda machine has mobilized the Russian population on behalf of this very militaristic, belligerent foreign policy. In Syria and Ukraine, it's had an incredibly destructive impact. But that being said, those kinds of distinctions that I was making about journalism and activism, they kind of happen at the other end too. It's not always easy to draw a bright line between where one ends and one begins.

The second point you're making, which is about the kind of self-reinforcing nature of the media ecosystem and the way in which people seem to seek out their own views, I mean, I'd really like to hear that from you. You know, I see that as an issue. It doesn't get me all agitated. I mean, I think that.... And I don't think that.... I mean, I think that average people who consume information care very much in different ways about ensuring that it's accurate, and that it's fair, and that it reflects certain perspectives that they might have or reinforces views that are deeply held. But I don't think they get all agitated about, you know, "You're a journalist, and you're not," you know, the way that journalists do, the journalists themselves do.

Pam Fine: Well, I wanted to ask Jake this question. When this 20-something in the Indianapolis Star stood up and said, you know, "When are we going to as journalists acknowledge that gay marriage is right?"—with the implication that she either didn't want to include the folks who were against the ruling—what would you say to her?

Jake Horowitz: Yeah, I think that's an interesting one, just as there was a lot of discussion in our newsroom around Black Lives Matter and covering those protests that were happening in Baltimore and Ferguson, or climate change is always another one. How do you cover these issues?

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

I mean, before I get into that, I would say a few things just on Joel's point. I mean, I think one thing, there's a few interesting trends happening online, right? One is that there no longer is — there's confusion or blurred lines between what was once the op-ed page and the news section. Now there's everything on your Facebook feed, right? And a lot of times it's actually not quite labeled very well. And so one of the things that we have seen is that people want labeling. They want to know what they are reading. And they are tired of just one side of the argument or being misled by something that is being passed off as news that's actually just opinion and not news.

So I think that's one trend. And I've heard that everywhere. I mean, we go to high schools talking to—I guess they're called, what—Gen Z, five to 18 high schools, talking to millennials, talking to.... And I think that's a common thing that in today's day and age, when there's just this one feed of tons of stuff going through your feed, you want to know what you're reading.

I think the other thing that's interesting is that video is having its heyday right now, right? Video is everywhere—short video, long video, Facebook Live, Periscope. And what that has done has brought personality back into news and made it much more important, right? So I think just as much as people want labeling, they also are now following their trusted voices in video in a way that, you know, there's new op-ed columnists, but they are through video now. And you're going back and tuning in and watching a personality at Mic that you really like or lots of other places.

And I think those two things are working in tandem. But if you know what you're getting, so if you know who the personality is, who you want to follow, and you know what their bias is, and you know what their perspective is, you're comfortable with it, and you're okay with it, but you want to know. And I think that's really, really important.

And then the last thing is just on some of these social issues. They are really tough calls. They are really, really tough calls as newsrooms, because, I mean, particularly for us, you know, millennials, it's the most diverse generation. There's 80-million millennials across the U.S. We want to make sure that we're not representing just the folks on the East Coast or the West Coast or folks who have a certain political leaning.

And the country is really diverse, and that's what we're seeing in this election is, there's just so many different perspectives. But I think you can do the work of reporting on hashtags or reporting on the same sex marriage movement without going the extra step of saying, you know, "In your reporting, we definitely agree." And that's what we've tried to do.

Emma Daly: I just wanted to come back to your earlier question. I think another place where we're seeing—I don't know if it's exactly blurring—is in the rise of government sponsored TV channels, like Press TV, RT, CCTV, where governments like Russia and China are making *huge* investments in

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

global cable news networks and where, you know, the reporting is absolutely not to be relied on in many, many cases.

You know, how those differ from Al Jazeera or Al Jazeera English versus Al Jazeera Arabic, Alhurra, you know, it's a very complex situation, but certainly they, you know, Russia and China are making a huge play both online and in TV news to try to disseminate what they—the kind of information that they want to be picked up.

And, you know, I remember last time. Economics comes into play here a lot. Last time I was in South Africa, I was pretty upset to discover that on basic cable you didn't get BBC or Al Jazeera English unless you paid, but you did get RT and CCTV for free. And, you know, I think that's a worrying trend.

Pam Fine: Yes.

Peter Bale: Thanks. Peter Bale. I work at Center for Public Integrity. I'd like to make an assertion, of course, because we always dress up assertions as questions. But I also would like to get some advice from the panel here, because this is something we wrestle with every day, of course, at a nonprofit. There are regular implications of crossing the boundary between journalism and advocacy. And I also think there's a particular—I won't call it an obsession, because that sounds negative—but there's a particular focus on that gap amongst journalists who've chosen to work in that space. And they have to be careful of it. So I'd like your advice, really, on how to address that gap, because to me it's about intent. We go into it with the intent to do journalism. The intent is journalistic. It may expose.... There was one of Emma's quotes—something we tweeted about and we talked about—ending torture. It's not necessarily our job to end torture. It's our job to expose torture. And then it's the advocate's job to pick that up.

And I'd like to know if you agree with that, how we can deal with it, because personally I feel we're advocates for free speech, for the 1st Amendment, for the protection of journalists both practically and physically, and sort of protection of the business model that we have to do. But I worry about my own risk of stepping into that advocacy world. Thank you.

Pam Fine: Who wants to respond?

Daniela Gerson: I will throw this back to everyone else. But I will say, you know, one of the things that we were discussing as we were preparing was this question that I'm sure you wrestle with all the time in terms of where your money is coming from, how that shapes it, and then how you define yourself. So I am also part of actually a grant-funded initiative at the Los Angeles Times on education coverage. And it was specific to provide additional coverage of certain communities, of students' parents in Los Angeles. But also the funding comes from—part of the funding comes from groups affiliated with charter schools, which have a certain agenda. And so,

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

how do we define ourselves against them? How do you make sure that you're reporting impartially? And then we were talking about, it wasn't that different than what you're doing in the advocacy role, which I thought was interesting as well.

Joel Simon: Yeah. I mean, that is a question that I think has to do more with—to a certain extent—with the kind of institutional culture you're trying to create within your own media organization. I mean, you may have completely different standards than, say, the New York Times in terms of the amount of advocacy that you allow your journalists to do. But I think you're still well within the parameters of what we would consider to be journalism. So, I mean, there's a separate question about, you know, your 503C status, and what constitutes lobbying, and how much lobbying you can do, but that's very regulated and very clear. So, I mean, I think that, again, there's no... I can't give specific guidance other than to say the point I made in my talk, that the line gets blurrier and blurrier the further you move along the continuum, but that each media organization has the ability to create its own institutional culture within the parameters of what constitutes responsible journalism.

Pam Fine: Yeah. And I go with the Kovach/Rosenstiel approach, which [is in] shorthand VIA, verification, independence, and accuracy. And I throw fairness in there. But if you start with the idea that you're going to be fair, where that doesn't mean a disproportionate balance, it means, though, that you're going to fairly look at it, report it, and you're certainly going to verify, make sure you're accurate, and then you let the chips fall where they may. You know, it does go to the idea, however, that by pointing your pen at something, you in fact are making a judgment. And that you go in feeling like some wrong has to be righted or something has to be explained or addressed that isn't. So there's always some degree of advocacy in your choices, but then I think how you exercise your journalistic practices is really critical to whether you can retain your credibility, in my mind.

Emma Daly: But I think that holds true for our work as well, because the reason that we're effective as advocates is because people trust our information. That's why we try to build up such a watertight case. But I also think Peter is right that despite the sort of long history of muckraking, where the point was to expose things to change them, for many journalists, it feels strange to take that next step of actually trying to make recommendations. Although, there is, of course, the whole notion of solutions journalism now, which is offering models for how to do things better.

Pam Fine: Yes?

Rosental Calmon Alves: Last one.

Pam Fine: Last question.

17th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Man: [Talks off mic at first.] I've got a big voice, but not that big. [laughter]

Pam Fine: One minute.

Man: All right. Very quickly then. Just not to focus too much more on advocacy versus journalism, but obviously, the stories you guys report on are fairly heavy. And one of the criticisms that we hear, one of the reasons that we hear for so much disengagement, particularly, by Gen X—or excuse me—Gen Y millennials and younger is that they feel disempowered. They watch the news. It's just an avalanche of bad stuff. And then at the end of that, there's no solution. You're just supposed to sit there and feel bad about yourself. There are some new models around this, like, Riot. Are you guys familiar with those? [Several panelists nod their heads.] Yeah. Where at the end of the story, they have a little button there that says, "Do this. Donate here. Take this action. Send this to your congressman. Blah, blah, blah." If the audience actually wants that, if that actually increases the engagement, if that actually serves our community, is that crossing the line over into advocacy?

Pam Fine: And we'll leave that as a rhetorical question. Thank you very much, panelists.

[Applause.]