Journalistic Networks and the Diffusion of Local News: The Brief, Happy News Life of the "Francisville Four"

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Through a combination of network ethnography and more traditional, qualitative newsroom analysis, this article undertakes a step-by-step analysis of the circulation of a particular set of news facts—those relating to the eviction and arrest of a group of homeowners in Philadelphia during a single week in June 2008, a time period in which the story of the arrests emerged, exploded, and then quickly faded away. The article discusses some of the larger explanatory factors that might have contributed to the particular pattern of news diffusion described here, as well as the degree to which the factors observed might be generalizable across other cases. The article adds local nuance to Benkler's (2006) description of information circulation in the networked public sphere, pointing to a pattern of iterative pyramiding in which key Web sites positioned within highly particular communities of interest act as bridges to larger, more diffused digital communities. The article also argues that news movement in the particular incident discussed can be characterized by an unusual combination of fact-entrepreneurship and a process of categorical misrecognition in which the circulation dynamics of the networked news ecosystem are leveraged by institutional and quasi-institutional communicative actors to advance particular occupational and professional goals, all the while misrecognizing both the identity and goals of the other nodes in the Philadelphia media sphere. Overall, the article serves as a preliminary attempt to outline the changing architecture of local journalism ecologies during a period of rapid news industry.

Keywords media sociology, newswork, social movements, public sphere, network analysis

Technological, economic, and workplace developments over the past half-decade have dramatically changed the structure of local journalistic ecosystems, at least in the United States. The shifts have been stark, particularly in metropolitan and urban areas that were once the locus of a majority of independent news gathering and professional reporting (Downie & Schudson, 2010). If these structural shifts can be said to have begun with a migration toward digital production technologies and online newsrooms (Boczkowski, 2004; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009) and the concomitant explosion of a variety of forms of quasi-professional and amateur journalistic content (Domingo et al., 2008; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004), the key trends have only accelerated in the past 2 years,

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with the all-out economic collapse of the once stable American news industry in general and the newspaper business in particular (Pickard, Carig, & Stearns, 2009).

The academic literature on the technological, professional, and economic shifts in news production discussed above is vast and growing. This article tries to take the next step and examine, in some depth, how a single cluster of news facts traveled within an actually existing metropolitan news ecosystem and why those facts diffused in the precise manner they did. Taking for granted that local news ecologies are changing, in other words, it might be helpful to inquire how the circulation of news facts is reflected in this new media environment. Some of the causal factors in driving the diffusion of news might not be entirely new or related to online developments; rather, the real dynamics of local news circulation may lie at the intersection of the old strategies and new structural opportunities for strategic enactment.

The article begins with a review of the existing literature on news diffusion. It describes the methodology that productively complicated the rather simplistic models posited thus far in most of the extant literature on informational diffusion. The bulk of the article is taken up with a step-by-step analysis of the circulation of a particular set of news facts—those relating to the eviction and arrest of a group of homeowners in Philadelphia during a single week in June 2008, during which the story of the arrests emerged, exploded, and then quickly faded away. The article concludes by discussing some of the larger explanatory factors that might have contributed to the particular pattern of news diffusion described here, as well as the degree to which the factors observed might be generalizable across other cases. The article adds local nuance to Benkler's (2006) description of information circulation in the networked public sphere, pointing to a pattern of iterative pyramiding, by which I mean to describe a process in which key Web sites positioned within highly particular communities of interest acted as bridges to larger, more diffused digital communities. I also argue that news movement in the particular incident discussed here can be characterized by an unusual combination of fact-entrepreneurship and a process of categorical misrecognition in which the circulation dynamics of the networked news ecosystem are leveraged by institutional and quasi-institutional communicative actors to advance particular occupational and professional goals, all the while "misrecognizing" both the identity and goals of the other nodes in the Philadelphia media sphere.

Literature on News Institutions and News Ecologies

Most of the recent academic literature on journalism and changes in news gathering practices can be divided into two broad streams, each with their own internal divisions and areas of focus (Anderson, 2008). One stream analyzes practices of cultural and rhetorical boundary maintenance among traditional journalists and their quasi-professional counterparts, while a second stream examines the daily work practices of reporters, bloggers, and what I call "journalistic hybrids." Within the first stream—focusing on boundary rhetoric and "occupational self-conception"—some studies analyze how digital journalists envision their work roles (Cassidy, 2007; Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002; Lowrey, 2006). Others examine the opinions journalists have about their nonprofessional counterparts, including bloggers, as well as the way in which nonprofessional groups have been framed by the traditional media (Roth, 2004; Himelboim, 2007). A final subset of research, particularly the 2006 Pew Internet and American Life Survey of the "Internet's new storytellers," has examined how bloggers think about themselves (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). The second stream of news-work literature, focusing more on work practices and less on professional self-conception, analyzes both relationships between online and traditional journalism and less traditional

journalistic practices (Atton, 2003; Eliasoph, 1997; Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, & Wright, 2006; Nardi et al., 2004; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008), as well as the increasing hybridity of new media work roles (Singer, 2005; Hermida & Thurman, 2007).

In general, each of these various subsets of the new journalism literature analyzes newswork as the accumulation, analysis, and distribution of a variety of news facts by news organizations—a process that, while changing under the impact of a variety of technological, cultural, and organizational forces, is largely analyzed within the (physical and metaphorical) walls of both traditional and nontraditional journalistic organizations. Research on changing patterns of newswork, in short, has focused on *news production* within *institutions* rather than the *circulation* of news in *ecosystems*. While I want to avoid the overtypologization of a news research literature marked by an impressive degree of heterogeneity and internal diversity, I would argue that research on newswork as an institutional process can be useful analogized as the study of factory-floor production (in which the locus of analysis is on the conversion of raw materials into usable "news goods"), while research on news ecosystems can be analogized as the trade and circulation of these goods—keeping in mind that this trading process involves a recurrent level of institutional (re)production as the news is continually (re)made.

If by news diffusion we mean the circulation and transformation of news "facts" inside a loosely joined news ecosystem, rather than simply gradually increasing levels of public knowledge about a particular incident (Greenberg, 1964), than a focus on the diffusion of news facts has antecedents in both the older and newer political communication literature. Although his primary concerns center on deliberative theory and, to a lesser degree, media framing, Page's case study (1996) of the mutating media coverage of Zoë Baird's nomination is an example of mass-media-focused research that analyzes the patterns of circulation of a single news story. In particular, Page's focus on the manner in which talk radio turned an arguably minor aspect of Baird's biography into front-page news might be seen as an ancestor of most modern forms of news diffusion analysis. Within news communications research, Benkler (2006) outlines the digital architectures of consumer attention and networked peer production that make up the news ecology of the Internet and provides several case studies documenting the circulation of controversial news stories in the new "networked public sphere." In both cases, the research straddles the line between the analysis of internal journalistic production processes that shape ("frame") the news and the circulation of that news between organizations and institutions.

The emergence of the blogosphere marks one of the most recent structural mutations of the news ecosystem, and much of the most recent research in the circulation/diffusion vein has been focused on parsing the relationship between blogging and traditional journalism. Legal scholar Neil Netanel (2008) notes that "[news] and opinion blogs are largely (but certainly not entirely) parasitic on the institutional press. They copy, quote from, discuss, and criticize stories reported in the press far more than engaging in original reporting or linking to other blogs." Murley and Roberts (2005) argue that blogs primarily engage in "second level agenda setting . . . playing off the stories proffered by traditional media outlets" (p. 17). Graves (2007) provides a detailed, though entirely text-based, overview of the diffusion of several important news stories between 2002 and 2005. In his study of *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report*, finally, Baym (2009) discusses the transformation of media content from a "linear, bounded artifact" to a "divisible data stream of image, text, and sound" that can be increasingly segmented, abridged, appended, or otherwise reassembled into different distribution contexts" (p. 6); his analysis, while emphasizing a news process of circulation and disassemblage, focuses on the cultural and technological conditions

that enable what he calls the "remixing of news" rather than the diffusion of information per se.

The vast majority of the recent literature on newswork, in short, focuses on one particular aspect of news production—the work done to assemble news stories within the newsroom—while ignoring the later circulation of those stories in the larger news ecosystem. Studies taking a more ecological point of view, on the other hand, are almost entirely provisional. All of them, finally, study news diffusion via the analysis of online texts; none have examined the circulation of news from an ethnographic perspective. This study, then, marks a first provisional attempt to analyze the manner in which news diffuses within the changing local journalistic ecosystem, focusing on both the movement and production of news, from within the newsroom itself.

Methodology and Overview

This news diffusion analysis is part of a larger, multiyear ethnographic study analyzing changes in news production, collaboration, and journalistic authority in one American city: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was chosen as the site of the ethnographic analysis because of its structural similarities to other local media systems, the history of its traditional and nontraditional news institutions, and because of the author's extensive ethnographic access to multiple media organizations. A key aspect of the larger study (and one of central importance here, given the emphasis on the interinstitutional circulation of news) is the adoption of a methodological perspective, following Howard (2002), of the *network ethnography*. A network ethnography uses ethnographic field methods to analyze field sites chosen via social network analysis. "Active or passive observation," writes Howard, "extended immersion, or in-depth interviews are conducted at multiple sites or with interesting subgroups that have been purposively sampled after comparison through social network analysis" (p. 561).

Prior to beginning local news research, the researcher constructed two social network maps of the online Philadelphia media sphere, drawing on data compiled through the social network mapping services IssueCrawler (http://issuecrawler.net) and Morningside Analytics (http://morningside-analytics.com). The initial nodes in the sample were determined through an initial round of exploratory fieldwork, as well as through snowball sampling of aggregator lists of all local Philadelphia blogs. These initial nodes were analyzed through co-link analysis, described as follows by the creators of IssueCrawler:

> IssueCrawler is web network location and visualization software. It consists of crawlers, analysis engines and visualisation modules. It is server-side software that crawls specified sites and captures the outlinks from the specified sites. Sites may be crawled and analyzed in three ways: co-link, snowball and inter-actor. Co-link analysis crawls the seed URLs and retains the pages that receive at least two links from the seeds. (Govcom.org, 2009)

Both the IssueCrawler and Morningside Analytics maps of the Philadelphia media sphere gave insight into the news networks' central nodes, periphery, bridges, clusters, and connectors.

Following the general outlines of the network ethnographic method, key sites were selected for varying periods of ethnographic research and analysis, both in Philadelphia newsrooms and a qualitative analysis of the local blogging community. Specifically, the researcher undertook a 60-month process of iterative, qualitative fieldwork, both on- and

offline, with the most intense period of observation occurring between May and August 2008. All in all, over 300 hr of newsroom observation were conducted, along with more than 60 semistructured interviews with journalists, editors, activists, bloggers, and media executives. Interviews and ethnographic notes were then coded manually, following the general model of "grounded theory," with early observations used to determine initial categories that were then iteratively revised after several cycles of additional fieldwork and coding (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This study traces a news incident that unfolded over the course of the larger ethnographic project, with the bulk of the analysis—though not all of it—conducted during a single week in June 2008.

The incident examined here—the eviction of four Philadelphia activists from their home and the small protests that subsequently followed—can be seen as representative of the majority of day-to-day newswork carried out by local media institutions. In Philadelphia, these institutions included two daily newspapers (the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*) and a Web site, Philly.com, that aggregates the content produced by both papers; a key cluster of local blogs, many run on a commercial basis and some operated by former journalists; an additional set of more politically active Web sites and discussion boards, including the Philadelphia Independent Media Center (Philly IMC) and Young Philly Politics; the public radio station WHYY; and the three local TV networks.[1] I hope that this catholic sense of what constitutes a news organization, a structurally nuanced sense of the key media outlets in Philadelphia, and a deliberate focus on an "everyday" incident can provide this case study with some degree of generalizability, despite its many idiosyncrasies.

Emergence of the "Francisville Four" in the Online Political Press

On Friday, June 13, 2008, at 5:19 p.m., activists with the Philadelphia-based radio activist group Prometheus Radio Project sent out an e-mail announcing that four Philadelphia residents, initially identified only as "critics of the police," had been arrested in a police raid earlier in the day. According to the e-mail, there was no good reason behind the arrests other than law enforcement harassment. "Philadelphia Police descended upon the home of homeowners who have been questioning police tactics in Mayor Nutter's new 'stop and frisk' program," the e-mail read. "4 residents were arrested in their home at 17th Street and Ridge Avenue, and the police are in the process of sealing the building. The homeowners are being held at the police station, no charges have yet been filed." One of the arrestees was the owner of the home, Daniel Moffat. The e-mail concluded by linking the homeowners' arrest to larger city issues of police misconduct. "Few imagined that simple criticism of a city policy could result in the seizure of one's home and subject residents to arrest" (Tridish, 2008).[2]

Although Prometheus Radio's political work centers on the rather esoteric issues of low power radio and online spectrum access, its key members are long-time members of the local radical community, with many living in several large collective houses in West Philadelphia (Dunbar-Hester, 2008). Word of the arrests thus spread quickly across what is known locally as the "West Philly activist scene." About an hour later that Friday, having already heard about the raid from friends, Philadelphia reporter Henry Baker[3] (who often contributes work to various local "citizen media" projects) received the Prometheus e-mail and forwarded it to the editorial group of the Philadelphia Independent Media Center (IMC; Pickard, 2006). Using the open publishing feature of the IMC Web site, Baker also turned the story into a Web site "news brief" on his own initiative. Baker's e-mail proposed that Philly IMC turn the news brief into a full feature—meaning that it should be placed at

the top spot on the Web site. Editors quickly agreed, and by 6:54 p.m. on July 13 (about 90 min after the distribution of the original Prometheus e-mail), a feature about the arrests had been posted to the Philly IMC site. Headlined "Police critics arrested, home seized in police raid!" the story was little more than a repost of the original Prometheus press release (Tridish, 2008).

While the featuring process was being quickly and easily negotiated at Philly IMC, a more fraught conversation was taking place at a second activist-journalist hub, Young Philly Politics (YPP; http://youngphillypolitics.com). Much as he did with Indymedia, Henry Baker posted the Prometheus press release on the "blog" section of the YPP site at 6:21 p.m. (journalists4mumia, 2008a). Unlike with Indymedia, however, a second YPP user, "MrLuigi," quickly critiqued the post in the comments. Particularly problematic for MrLuigi was the press release's assertion that Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter had declined to attend community meetings discussing recent examples of police misconduct. Nutter was a marked improvement over previous Philadelphia mayors in this regard, MrLuigi asserted. "I'm very interested to hear more concrete details about this recent arrest, but to be absolutely clear the blank assertion that this mayor and this police commissioner are less then a noticeable step forward from the past in terms of community relations seems pretty dubious to me" (MrLuigi, 2008).

Baker responded, again in the comments section, by acknowledging that the state of community–police relations under Nutter might mark an improvement over past mayors, but also shifted the conversation to the topic of the story's inherent *newsworthiness*.

> I, too, am waiting for more information. . . . But, I really want to help get the word out, so that the chances are better of these folks getting fair treatment and having the facts get out. *I've personally known the folks at Prometheus Radio for many years, and called both the folks listed at the bottom to confirm the email, so this does seem like a very serious story.* (journalists4mumia, 2008a)

In this exchange, Baker defends his journalistic credentials—by emphasizing, first, the public importance of the story; second, the goals it might serve (increased "fair treatment" for those arrested); third, the reliability of his sources ("*I've personally known the folks at Prometheus Radio for many years*"); and, finally, what he sees as his journalistic spadework ("*[I] called both the folks listed at the bottom to confirm the email*").

It was on the subject of journalistic credibility that the site's lead moderator and Web producer took issue with the story, about 12 hr after the original posting. Under the headline "YPP standards," the producer noted "a vague email forward does not cut it here, especially if you are accusing people of fairly serious stuff. If you have more than that, post it. If not, please wait till you get something a little more concrete, like any sort of actual source" (Dan U-A, 2008b). This comment prompted an important exchange regarding the status of Baker's story and the general journalistic role of YPP. After Baker largely repeated his original justifications for posting the story, stating that he "stood behind it" (journalists4mumia, 2008b), the moderator noted:

> Sure, you can stand behind it. But, this isn't a democracy, and I am telling you that it doesn't meet standards here. When I say a source: how about a witness, how about a name, how about a first person account, how about a police report, how about anything at all? . . . I am not trashing Prometheus radio or Philly

IMC, and what they decide to forward, report on or feature. But different places have different standards, and if you are going to post here, that isn't a debatable point. (Dan U-A, 2008a)

After Baker expressed his disappointment with Young Philly Politics and repeated his assertions that the Prometheus Radio press release, combined with the public identification of press contacts, constituted reliable sources for him, a second site producer also weighed in on the question:

Also, re: "website policy" or whatever, I'd like to say one thing, generally: *a site like this exists in a weird space between journalism and, like, standing around the corner gossiping and talking politics. So I'd like to think that the policies should not be so much about [us] drawing lines or playing some pseudo-dictatorial role, but rather as encouraging everyone to just recognize the power and responsibility of having a platform like this*, which even though it's virtual, creates a written record and has the power to affect the real world, for better and worse. (jennifer, 2008)

Several general items are worthy of note at this point, less than 48 hr into the Philadelphia arrest story. First, contrary to much of the existing literature on online journalism, a nonprofessional, entirely volunteer media organization did in fact "break" the story of the arrests. However, even among more amateur media outlets, there were serious doubts expressed as to whether the story as it stood on Philadelphia Indymedia contained enough "reporting" to be featured in contexts that transcended the local activist community. While the original volunteer reporter expressed confidence in the work he had done—reading the press release, contacting the authors of it to confirm the story—other journalists were looking for more: "a witness, a name, a first person account, a police report, anything at all" (Dan U-A, 2008a).

Many of these discussions also revolved around questions of organizational identity, self-perception, and perceptions of "the audience." YPP editors were acutely aware of the homologies between themselves and the "Indymedia crowd," and thus erected institutional markers around themselves to create a strong counteridentity from the Philadelphia IMC (interview with editors, July 9, 2008). This need for boundary work helps to explain the unusually hostile remarks about YPP "standards" expressed by the site moderator in his e-mail exchange with Henry Baker.

Finally, one should note that in all cases these amateur reporters echoed traditional journalistic concerns and thought processes in their assessment of the news. Baker defended his story by invoking notions of source reliability, public relevance, and journalistic routines ("*[I] called both the folks listed at the bottom to confirm the email*"). The Young Philly Politics editor responded by asking for additional reporting. Finally, a second YPP editor alluded to the "public responsibility" inherent in maintaining a community Web site.

By the end of the weekend of June 14, however, the story of the arrests remained the tree in the proverbial forest: It had fallen, but (almost) no one had heard it, so was it really news? Simultaneously, however, additional journalistic work was occurring at more mainstream news organizations, work that would soon turn the story of the "Francisville Four" into a major local story.

From Alternative Weekly to Tabloid to Broadsheet

On the afternoon of June 13, the editorial offices of the *Philadelphia City Paper* (one of the city's two alternative weekly newspapers, along with the *Philadelphia Weekly*) took a telephone call from "a friend of a friend" (interview with editors, June 17, 2008) of one of the people arrested at the house on 17th Street and Ridge Avenue. Isaiah Thompson, the reporter dispatched to the scene, told me that he was new to the Philadelphia area and the caller was not a regular source. "I think somebody in the house knew somebody at the paper," he surmised. "In any case," he added, "I pretty much ran down there" (interview with Thompson, June 17, 2008). Thompson's article, which appeared on the *City Paper*'s daily blog, "The Clog" (http://www.citypaper.net/blogs/clog), on June 14, contained the first extensive information about the arrests as well as a number of unusually candid quotes from members of the Philadelphia Police Department. A photo of the scene of the arrests, as well as an interview with the building's co-owner, Robert Gilbert, "on the scene yesterday afternoon," marked Thompson's presence as a direct observer of the scene at some point on June 13. The second and third paragraphs of the story established the chain of events leading to the arrests:

> [Daniel] Moffat [the arrestee] watched from the squad car as the officers entered the building and detained three other residents who were inside. Then a funny thing happened: Homeland Security showed up. And more detectives. And then the Crime Scene unit. And then more detectives. And the Fire Marshall. And Licensing and Inspection. And then more detectives. All day long and into Friday evening, the building was crawling with officials from one agency or another. (Thompson, 2008)

The article also contained the first interview with Daniel Moffat, who repeated the original contention of the press release that the police were targeting members of his house because of their neighborhood activism. Finally, the article provided the first justification for the police department's actions, courtesy of 9th District captain Denis Wilson, who spoke to the *City Paper* "gravely from the building's doorway," along with two other on-scene officers. The police claimed that the building contained "literature about killing cops" and "propaganda against the government," and then made a statement that would be cited numerous times throughout the additional reporting on the story: "'They're a hate group,'" said Capt. Wilson. "'We're trying to drum up charges against them, but, unfortunately, we'll probably have to let them go'" (Thompson, 2008). The story was posed on The Clog at 4:23 p.m. on Saturday, June 14. When the *City Paper* hit the streets on Wednesday, a small box on the cover touted the "online only coverage" of the Francisville arrest story.

By the start of the workday Monday, friends of those arrested had put a media plan in place to further publicize what local activists were now calling the "illegal arrests." The first sign of the media blitz came in the form of a new, much more detailed press release that quickly, in the words of one *Philadelphia Daily News* editor, "went viral." A copy of the release appeared on Young Philly Politics at 8:30 a.m., complete with a prefatory note acknowledging that its authors had "seen lots of debate about whether or not the information that my colleagues and friends released Friday about the police action at 17th and Ridge was enough for folks," and adding that "over the weekend [supporters of those arrested] developed this press release, and decided to organize a press conference [at 1 p.m. Tuesday] to answer questions" (hannahjs, 2008). One of the *Daily News* city editors received "at least five" e-mails containing the press release, from both reporters

and sources, and another veteran reporter "got one email, maybe more" (interviews conducted by the author, June 17, 2008). The press release did not originate from Young Philly Politics; rather, "friends of the people arrested sent out the press release to everyone and their mother" (interview conducted by the author, June 17, 2008).

"The story was just intriguing enough to catch my interest," said a *Daily News* city editor, noting that four-fifths of what he called "activist-type press releases" amounted to nothing at all. "I think we're always skeptical of this type of thing," he said, but noted the fact that the release "went viral" was enough to briefly grab the paper's collective attention (interview with editor, June 19, 2008). The level of online conversation generated by the story on Young Philly Politics also played a role in reinforcing the potential importance of the story, adding to a sense in the newsroom that the topic was "hot." "When people are excited, we notice it," concluded the city editor (interview with editor, June 19, 2008). The reporter assigned to report the story for the Tuesday edition of the *Philadelphia Daily News* first encountered the *City Paper* story *after* he had already started his reporting—"It was the press releases that caught our attention," he said, "and we saw the *City Paper* article once we'd already begun the reporting" (interview with reporter, June 17, 2008). As *Daily News* editors debated the next day's newspaper at their afternoon editorial meeting, staffers described a mix of excitement and skepticism surrounding the arrests. "The consensus in the room was that it was a good story," said a second city editor, "but there was skepticism about the motives of the people [pushing] it" (interview with editor, June 17, 2008).

One floor up in the newsroom of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, metro columnist and blogger Dan Rubin remembered seeing the Indymedia story over the weekend and bookmaking it. "Then on Monday I got a note from Brian Howard of *City Paper*, touting his reporter's version of it." Two minutes later, Rubin recalled, he received the same widely distributed e-mail announcing the Tuesday news conference. "I didn't have a Wednesday column lined up," Rubin said, "so I jumped on it." Rubin remembers that the IMC story was not enough, in itself, to prompt him to write about the arrests "because their article wasn't really anything more than a press release, and I don't like linking to press releases" (interview with the author, June 17, 2008). By the end of the day, though, Rubin "wasn't sure if [the arrest] was a column or a story because there was so much unknowable, and to columnize, I'd have wanted a better sense of what to make of it all. So I prepared to do a totally different column for Wednesday, which I did. But," he added, "I had all this material, and we hadn't done anything for the paper yet. So [on Tuesday morning] . . . I start[ed] writing. For the blog. Because I could."

Philadelphia's major news organizations first reported the Francisville arrest story on Tuesday, June 17. The *Philadelphia Daily News* article, "The Cops Came, Searched and Left a Mess for Puzzled Homeowner," was touted on the cover, featured on page 7, and was the first appearance of the story in printed form. The Dan Rubin blog post, "Who Wrote 'Kill The Pigs' at 17th & Ridge?" was posted at 8:52 in the morning. Both stories would eventually move to the top slot of Philly.com. The online version of the *Daily News* story contained no links, although it prominently quoted the *City Paper* article (Davies, 2008); the Rubin post, on his blog *Blinq*, linked to both the *City Paper* and to Davies's story in the *Philadelphia Daily News* (Rubin, 2008).

Both pieces were extensively reported and contained a wealth of new information; the police department claimed that their original visit to the property was prompted by the defacement of a neighborhood security camera, that someone wrote "kill the pigs" on the wall of the raided home, that the residents of the building refused to identify the owner of the house, and that there was a "bunker" on the roof of the building. Moffat, who served as the lead interviewee in both stories, denied that anyone in the home wrote "kill

the pigs on the wall" ("If anyone did that, Moffat says, it was the police, themselves"); said that the police never claimed they were investigating a defaced security camera when they arrived; noted that the so-called bunker was really a greenhouse; produced a property receipt indicating "his laptop computer is now in the possession of the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Intelligence Division"; and admitted that he "panicked" when the police arrived, denying he was the owner of the building (Davies, 2008; Rubin, 2008).

Despite their many similarities, the two stories also contained a wealth of subtle differences. The *Philadelphia Daily News* article was an entirely "straight" news piece that, although containing a wealth of potentially damning information about police misconduct, explicitly allowed both "sides" in the arrest dispute to address the claims of the other. The bulk of the *Blinq* post did the same thing and yet was framed in a subtly different fashion. Compared to the *Daily News* lead ("Four young residents of a North Philadelphia house who circulated petitions questioning police-surveillance cameras were rousted from their home Friday and detained 12 hours without charges while police searched their house"), Rubin's introduction and conclusion demonstrated a slightly more skeptical attitude toward the activists. "Now that he's had time to think—and 10 hours in police detention gives you time for introspection—Dan Moffat concedes things might have gone better if he'd cooperated," Rubin began. And the author's conclusion was even more strongly put: "All I know [says Rubin of himself] is that if a bunch of cops came to my door and woke me up— at 3 a.m. even—my instinct would be to cooperate to the point of blurting out anything I'd ever done" (Davies, 2008; Rubin, 2008). Nevertheless, the bulk of the actual reported material was quite similar to the material gathered by the *Daily News*. A portion of the difference stemmed from differences in story form. While it is a well-known truism that reported journalism should be "objective," many informants in Philadelphia argued that blog material should contain, if not an explicit opinion, at the very least a strong authorial voice.

An additional explanation for the differences in the two articles—and, indeed, for differences in the arc of the story coverage in general—stemmed from differences in professional self-awareness and brand identity at the two newspapers. "This isn't an *Inquirer* story," one *Daily News* editor noted early in the week, "it's more of [a] gritty, *Daily News* type piece" (interview with editor, June 17, 2008). Indeed, no story about the arrests appeared in the print version of the *Inquirer* until the day *after* the Tuesday press conference—using the press conference as a news hook, but largely driven by the fact that the *Daily News* had already reported the story the previous day (Gregory, 2008).

Even more telling were the differences in follow-up planned by the two papers: while the *Daily News*, as we will see below, mounted a "mini-crusade" around the issue of the police raid, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* quickly moved to expand the meaning of the arrests in a far more general and skeptical direction. "I got the L&I [licensing and inspection] report and this house had a million violations against it," noted the *Inquirer* reporter who covered the activist press conference on Tuesday. Possibly alluding to the *Daily News*, though not by name, she continued: "I think we make characters out of the news sometimes." Speaking more than a month after the arrests, the reporter said that she thought the deeper issues brought to light by the story included the redevelopment of the North Philadelphia neighborhood where the arrests took place and the relationship between the arrestees and long-time community members. "This whole thing about people coming into the neighborhood, and [whether there are] tensions between them and the community," that's the story my editor and I care about, the reporter stated. Alluding to a post on a local blog, the reporter recounted another incident in which "anarchists" and members of a different neighborhood clashed over gentrification. "Some of the underlying stuff [that

is important to this story] is how do these two groups work together?" (interview with reporter, July 14, 2008).

Despite these differences in tone—though not in the actual substance of reported material—the Francisville arrest story had become "news." It had gained certification by both of the major newspapers in Philadelphia and had produced a well-attended press conference. The story would now expand into the local and national blogosphere. Indeed, it is at *this moment* in the development in the story that much of the academic literature on the "journalism–blogger" relationship begins.

The Local and Global Blogosphere

Within hours of the appearance of the *Daily News* story on Tuesday, the local Philadelphia blogosphere began devoting considerable attention to the travails of Daniel Moffat and his Francisville housemates. In particular, four local blogs—*Philebrity* (http://www.philebrity.org), *Philadelphia Will Do* (http://willdo.pwblogs.com), *Attytood* (http://www.attytood.com), and *Phawker* (http://www.phawker.com)—assured that the story would assume a life that went beyond the confines of the regular *Daily News* and *Inquirer* readership. In addition, the work of "local bridge bloggers" (bloggers bridging the gap between local news and a national audience) helped briefly move the story into national prominence.

Although several Web sites jumped on the Moffat story before Tuesday, linking to the early *City Paper* and Philadelphia Independent Media Center reports, it is clear that the major Philadelphia blogs were spurred into action by some combination of the original *Daily News* story and the Rubin post, along with the prominence given to both of these stories on Philly.com. In its June 17, 12:24 p.m. story, "It Would Be Hilarious If It Weren't True: Philly Cops Mistake Hipsters For M.O.V.E.-esque Hate Group," *Philebrity* linked to the *City Paper*, the *Daily News,* and *Blinq*; *Philadelphia Will Do* ("Cops Raid Dreamboat Terrorist's House") linked to the *Daily News*, the *City Paper*, and Indymedia (D-Mac, 2008); *Phawker* linked to the *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *City Paper* (Deeney, 2008). This amounts to fairly clear validation of the conventional wisdom about the journalism–blogging relationship: key local bloggers jumped on the story once it appeared in print; most coverage in the blogosphere linked back to the newspaper story (to such a degree that they even largely ignored the online-only story produced by a newspaper columnist); and most of the blog coverage contained little "original reporting" in the traditional journalistic sense of the word. That said, a more qualitative appraisal showed that this "classic" story of news diffusion was more complex than it initially appeared. Local blogs reframed the story and broadened the conversation. Some bloggers did, indeed, do original reporting. The editorial deliberations of one journalist–blogger demonstrated the complexity of online news judgments. Finally, the way the arrest story emerged from the local to the national blogosphere provided additional insights.

While they may not have provided much additional reporting, local blogs reframed the story in ways that both reflected and shaped the direction of the community conversation. Both *Philebrity* and *Philadelphia Will Do* blogged about the story early on Tuesday afternoon, and both blogs immediately added "snark" to the original story, writing about it in ways that typified their trademark brand of sarcastic humor. *Philadelphia Will Do* blogger Daniel McQuade, in addition to recapping the arrest events, noted that arrestee Moffat had dreamy eyes, eyes that were, in fact, "too dreamy for Philadelphia" (D-Mac, 2008).

At the same time, however, local bloggers seemed genuinely outraged by the police raid. "Frankly, we don't know where to even begin with this," wrote *Philebrity*. "But let's

start here: This is one of those Culture Wars arrests that cops are always going to lose by virtue of both sheer stupidity . . . and cultural ignorance" ("It Would Be Hilarious," 2008). *Philebrity* took the additional step of adding background and context to the story and framing it, through a series of links back to previous blog coverage, as part of a pattern of recent Philadelphia police misconduct. *Attytood* blogger Will Bunch also added context to the story (minus much of the sarcasm), linking back to posts he had written on civil liberties and the record of new Philadelphia police chief Charles Ramsey during his tenure in Washington, D.C. (Bunch, 2008a). "I was interested [in the story] because a) civil liberties is one of the main issues that I blog about and b) I'd specifically written last year about the lousy record of the DC cops on civil liberties under Charles Ramsey," according to Bunch (interview with the author, June 17, 2008). "So I waited for our story to come out, and added some commentary about Ramsey and how such an apparent abuse of power is harmful to fighting crime." In contrast to the newspaper's highly reported stories, then, the three most prominent local bloggers made it a point to deeply contextualize their posts, usually linking back to their own previous coverage of the topic. All three key local blogs would revisit the story several times over the next few days.

The local blog *Phawker*, alone among all other media outlets, also did some important original reporting the day after the *Daily News* story broke. "While everyone else was at City Hall for the press conference concerning the police raid of a Francisville building last Friday," wrote *Phawker* blogger Jeff Deeney, "I was on Ridge Avenue hoping to find my old friend Ms. Edna Williams, of the Mary Jane Enrichment Center" (Deeney, 2008). Deeney's connection with Williams went back to his days as a writer for the *City Paper*: "I wrote about Edna in a *City Paper* article about grassroots homeless services not long ago. . . . She's a strong voice among local community activists, and she's respected by social service providers as a tireless advocate for the downtrodden."

Deeney would turn to Williams in trying to answer one of the more pressing journalistic questions at this point in the development of the story, namely, what was the character of those arrested? Were they little more than "hipster" gentrifiers, or were they actually members of their North Philadelphia neighborhood? "If anyone would have a good read on the situation, it would be Edna at the Mary Jane," Deeney wrote. "When I asked her about the building up the street, she became gravely serious and told me to get the word out that Daniel Moffat and the friends that lived with him were good people." Deeney drew on his reportorial background—a high comfort level with basic reporting, a stable of relevant contacts, an ability to identify "the story," and an ability to collect, represent, and collate basic news facts—in order to advance the news of the arrests. His journalistic identity, however, is deeply deinstitutionalized: once a reporter for an alternative weekly (already several steps "down" the professional journalist food chain), he is listed in his *Phawker* biography as a freelance writer "and *a caseworker with a nonprofit housing program that serves homeless families*" (Deeney, 2008).

Will Bunch's description of how he decided to blog the Francisville story for *Attytood* adds nuance to the general pattern of news diffusion. As he wrote via e-mail:

> I actually first heard about the arrests the day before I wrote about it. Brian Howard of the *City Paper* and their blog the Clog sent me an email and said something about Homeland Security being on the site. Ironically, I was really tied up with non-work stuff on Monday and didn't have time to pursue it, but then one of our reporters made a point of telling me about the story he was working on when I came in to the office Monday night. . . . For me, the key was the fact that this particular reporter thought the police actions

were pretty egregious—he's a solid reporter and someone who takes an open
minded approach to every story. He's what bloggers mean when we talk about
"a trusted source" of information. *Had a different news outlet, or a blogger
reported the story, I'd be less likely to pick it up.* (June 17, 2008)

This e-mail helps flesh out the relationship between the blogger and the more tradi-
tional reporter. It was not simply that a "real journalist" wrote about the Francisville story,
but that a *particular* real journalist wrote about it: a "solid reporter and someone who
takes an open minded approach to every story." While it is unclear whether bloggers who
were not this reporter's colleagues (as Bunch is; their desks sit opposite one another in the
Philadelphia Daily News newsroom) would have been influenced by this reporter's high
reputation, a considerable number of reporters in Philadelphia—bloggers, radio reporters,
Indymedia journalists—spoke highly of him and often singled him out for special praise.
It is not unreasonable to speculate that reportorial reputation plays a more general role in
the circulation of information, even inside deinstitutionalized news ecologies. In addition,
the *City Paper* story, marketed aggressively by its editor, played a key role in reinforcing
the importance of the Francisville story in the minds of many journalists, even if that story
by itself would be unlikely to advance the story within the more institutional journalistic
community.

The manner in which this story briefly made a splash in the national blogosphere high-
lights the fact that a combination of structural positioning (the existence of Philadelphia
bloggers whose content production bridges local and more national/global news networks)
and story *reframing* turned this local story into national "news." In the diffusion of the
Francisville story across the blogosphere, we can see evidence of the importance of blogs
that maintain their connections to their local communities (both in terms of their actual
physical location and in terms of topics they occasionally write about) but usually address
national or international issues. It is these blogs that are most likely to be linked to by
more prominent sites in the blogosphere, which provides them with the opportunity to
occasionally bring local issues to a broader audience.

By 10:46 p.m. on Tuesday, June 17, news about the Francisville arrests had reached
the pages of *Boing Boing*, a prominent blog "of cultural curiosities and interesting tech-
nologies" (Doctorow, 2008). The key moment in the path from local story to global news
(at least in the blogosphere) began when Will Bunch e-mailed Duncan Black, a.k.a. Atrios,
a Philadelphia-area blogger who writes primarily, though not exclusively, about national
politics. "I emailed [the post] to Atrios, who's also interested in civil liberties and picks
up local issues from time to time—he did link to it," according to Bunch (interview with
the author, June 17, 2008). Black's blog *Eschaton* is one of the most popular liberal blogs
in the United States. Black's brief post, "Hate Group: I do not think that phrase means
what 9th District Police Capt. Dennis Wilson thinks it means" (Atrios, 2008), linked back
not to the Davies story, but to Bunch's blog post, and was then picked up by the science-
oriented national blog *Futurismic*, which reframed it as a story about the dangers of urban
surveillance cameras (Marcinko, 2008).

It was the *Futurismic* story, now reported in terms relevant to the tech-minded *Boing
Boing* audience, that helped the story make the final leap into the upper-level blogosphere.
"Privacy activists in North Philadelphia who circulated a petition opposing the spy-cameras
that were going up in their neighborhood were busted by cops on a warrantless raid," *Boing
Boing* blogger Corey Doctorow noted (Doctorow, 2008). The quote from Captain Dennis
Wilson—"the police captain later gave a press interview where he called them a 'hate
group' and said he hoped to 'drum up charges against them'"—first reported by a rookie

reporter for a small alternative weekly in the sixth largest city in the United States, had now reached the pages of "the most popular blog in the world" ("*Boing Boing* on Technorati," 2007).

The general division of labor between bloggers and journalists—journalists report, bloggers comment—is thus both an accurate and simplistic way to describe the relationship between traditional and new media during the coverage of the arrests in Philadelphia. The circuitous journey of this news item, however, was not complete. After a brief moment in the national spotlight, the saga of the "Francisville Four" would quickly become local news again; it would be the *Philadelphia Daily News*, the most resolutely local of Philadelphia's major newspapers, that would carry the story to its unsettled conclusion.

Live by the Tabloid, Die by the Tabloid

The much-hyped activist news conference on Tuesday afternoon presented something of a dilemma for the *Daily News*. "There wasn't much news there, and that makes it difficult to write anything new," said one reporter assigned to the story (interview with the author, June 17, 2008). Both reporters and editors also expressed renewed skepticism about aspects of Moffat's story. "Basically, I don't think he's being entirely upfront about his politics," an editor noted. But both the reporter ("Unless I hear otherwise, [I think what happened] is f——g b——t") and the editor ("I think the police wanted to bring the full weight of the city down on these kids") expressed an opinion that the story was deeply troubling (interviews with the author, June 17, 2008). An editor joked that the entire situation reminded him of the 1960s, "with the presence of outside agitators and all," but also seemed to accept the activist version of events (interview with editor, June 17, 2008). Reporter Dave Davies said that one interesting angle behind the arrests was the use of L&I to selectively enforce city codes for political purposes and suggested writing a column making that point. "The idea behind columns," an editor told me, "is to not let the story disappear," even when there is not an immediate news hook.

Davies, however, was not the only *Daily News* journalist with the idea of writing a column about the Francisville arrests. June Powell,[4] a *Daily News* columnist, was also thinking along similar lines. "There are certain stories that just jump out at me" as good column material, she said, "and I read the Dave Davies story on Tuesday and thought, 'this is a total outrage'" (interview with the author, June 20, 2008). The situation was a bit unusual, Powell said, insofar as Davies was also considering writing a column. "So I called Dave and he said, 'Well, let's just see what happens' . . . so I went ahead, thinking I was going to write a column [about something else] and then [an editor] said to me, 'What do you mean you are not going to be writing about this?' So I went ahead with the column on this, especially once I heard that [Dave] was going to be taking a slightly different angle" and would be focusing more on selective enforcement at L&I" (interview with the author, June 20, 2008).

According to Powell, writing a column is often a way to keep a particularly important story in the public eye and involves more than just opinion giving. "Reporting is involved," she said, and indeed Powell made a special trip to the June 19 city council session to specifically question Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter on the Francisville arrests.

By the end of the afternoon editorial meeting on Thursday, June 19, a decision had been reached that the two columns would not only run but would lead the next day's paper. "In the absence of anybody being honest" about what actually led to the arrests at 17th and Ridge, an editor argued, it made perfect sense to keep the story alive with the hope of pressuring city leaders to get to the bottom of the entire affair. Discussions surrounded the

question of how to work two columnists into a single cover story, rather than just one ("It might be worth putting just one of their stories on the cover," an editorial designer said), and what to do about the problem that the arrestees no longer wanted their pictures taken. Although there appeared to be some uncertainty about the exact contours of Friday's paper, it appeared certain that Moffat's story would lead the cover of the *Daily News*.

By the evening of June 19, however, editorial calculations had changed. Developments in a signature *Daily News* story—the legal trials and travails of local news anchor Alycia Lane—broke in the late afternoon when it emerged that Lane was initiating a lawsuit against her former employer, a local CBS News affiliate. Over the course of several months, the *Daily News* had relentlessly pushed the Lane story; it was a story—despite competition from the better resourced and usually stodgy *Philadelphia Inquirer*—that the *Daily News* felt it "owned" (interview with the author, June 3, 2008). Indeed, by the end of June a full fifth of the 50 top year-to-date stories on Philly.com involved the attractive, arrest-prone TV anchor. Even long-time reporter and national political blogger Will Bunch was not immune from the Lane frenzy that swept the *Philadelphia Daily News* newsroom the evening of June 19; indeed, with the absence of the vacationing gossip writer, Bunch ended up authoring what turned out to be the *actual* cover story for Friday, June 20: "Alycia tells her side in suit. She cites 'Dr. Phil' episode, rips Mendte" (Bunch, 2008b).

After a brief flirtation with the front page, Daniel Moffat and the "Francisville Four" would be bumped by an obsessively overreported story about the court filings of a local ex-TV news anchor. While one can argue that the choice of cover material represented a betrayal of the *Daily News'* "public" mission, it is difficult to imagine editors making any other decision. Indeed, it seems clear that the very news practices that helped Moffat be considered cover material in the first place—the *Daily News'* tendencies toward sensationalism; its willingness to "crusade" on the behalf of those it felt were wronged by city government; its tendency to bypass reporting on deeper, cultural issues in favor of turning news events into "characters" (in contrast to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*); its comfort in putting two opinion columns on its front page—were the same practices that doomed him in head-to-head competition with Alycia Lane. The Lane story, after all, was the bread and butter of the *Philadelphia Daily News* in the summer of 2008. While both Powell's and Davies's Francisville columns did run together in the June 20 paper, Powell admitted that "where a column is placed shapes a lot of the impact it has." Although Powell "thought that [it] was a great idea to have two strong columns on it lead the paper," she was not particularly disappointed, or even surprised, by the eventual decision to lead with Alycia Lane. "It goes with the turf," she noted—live by the tabloid, die by the tabloid (interview with the author, June 20, 2008).

In the days following the *Daily News'* columns, the story of Daniel Moffat and the "Francisville Four" would disappear from the public consciousness. Philadelphia Indymedia, retaining its strong links with the activist community and largely insulated from the normal cycle of what counted as "meaningful" news, would publish a fairly extensive piece of "first-person" reporting from two of the arrestees on June 22 (Rousset & Rock, 2008). This article would mark Indymedia's first bit of original reporting since posting the Prometheus press release more than a week earlier. The *Philadelphia Daily News* followed up with a brief item in its "Philly Clout" page on June 27, noting that Moffat had been placed on a city hall "watch list" despite the absence of any additional evidence against him (Philly Clout, 2007). Other than those brief items, the story appeared forgotten by the end of the summer. According to one reporter, the disappearance of this particular piece of news had as much to do with the actions of the police department and the activists as it did with formal editorial decisions. The arrestees appeared more interested in using their brief

moment of notoriety to push their larger political goals through the media, this reporter told me, and the threat of an ACLU lawsuit against the city seemed to have placed the police department in an official "no comment" posture. "[The activists] still haven't filed a complaint. . . . They [the activists] won't even follow up on their own story, so it makes you, think, well, how serious, how aggrieved could you feel if you won't file a complaint?" (interview with reporter, July 14, 2008).

The preceding sections have chronicled the diffusion of the Francisville Four story, from its emergence on Philadelphia Indymedia to its near ascendance to the front page of the *Philadelphia Daily News* to its disappearance from the news entirely. It should be noted, before moving on to a final discussion and conclusion, that Daniel Moffat and his friends did not make a single appearance on the local TV news—arguably the *most important* media outlet in the local Philadelphia media system. While it is difficult to explain a negative—to explain why local TV was the "dog that didn't bark"—I would speculate that the Moffat story was *particularly* unsuited to coverage by local television. It consisted of little if any visual footage and only emerged as a story several days after the original event. That said, it is doubtful that the eventual outcome of the story would have been any different even if Moffat and his friends had managed to crack local TV. It may be enough to note that genre and medium distinctions in newsgathering remain a factor in the emergence of local news, even as these media increasingly blur in digital space.

Factors Shaping News Flow in the Local News Ecosystem

This article's goal was to examine the manner in which news and information diffused inside a shifting local media ecosystem and to advance some tentative conclusions about *why* this information circulated the way it did. In this final section, I use the work of Benkler, who has advanced one of the most theoretically nuanced understandings of information diffusion in what he calls the "networked public sphere," as a point of summary and departure. The lengthy analysis preceding this discussion section can add nuance and complexity to the argument in *The Wealth of Networks* that the emerging architecture of online information can be described as "iteratively pyramidal," as well as a more general argument that "the [new] social practices of information and discourse allow a very large number of actors to see themselves as potential contributors to public discourse and as potential actors in political arenas" (Benkler, 2006, p. 220). In this final section, I argue that the iterative pyramid model of information should be seen as having a local dimension as well; that is, it operates in the local news ecosystem as well as the national one. I also contend that Benkler's general (but structural) model of increased political and informational participation, while formally accurate, should be supplemented by a focus on the strategic actions of local political actors, as well as the complex editorial practices of traditional and nontraditional media organizations.

Benkler's argument about the changing architecture of networked information occupies something of a middle ground between earlier, radical hopes that the Internet would make "every man a pamphleteer" (in the words of the U.S. Supreme Court and early Internet utopians) and more recent, mathematically grounded analyses that see the functional outcome of networked informational systems as a power law distribution wherein a few select information producers are "freely chosen" as the primary information source by news consumers. While Benkler does not deny the existence of networked power laws (and with them, the filtering of information through a few key digital nodes), he modifies the "two-dimensional" power law argument to take into account a "three-dimensional" Internet in which information migrates towards Web-based platforms with a more and more

general readership, enabled by the clustering of attention afforded by the net. In Benkler's (2006) model, information scales "upward" from clusters of deeply interlinked interests to more general-interest Web sites and attention clusters, "forming a filtering and transmission backbone for universal intake and local filtering" (p. 248).

We can see this basic model of news circulation play out in the example of the Francisville Four. Local newspapers, particularly the *Daily News*, acted as the informational bridge that diffused the Moffat story into the local blogosphere; this structural position was not occupied by either the Independent Media Center or the *City Paper*, even though their reporting was chronologically antecedent to the newspaper coverage. Likewise, bloggers with one foot in the national and one foot in the local blogosphere (particularly Duncan Black of *Eschaton*) acted as a "bridge" between the lower and higher traffic blogospheres. We see here neither informational anarchy nor the complete reemergence of an older, mass media dominated hierarchy, but a new model somewhere in between.

This observation that the pattern of information circulation in the Francisville Four story resembles Benkler's model of iterative pyramiding, however, does not explain *why* this news diffused in the manner it did, unless one adopts a deeply structuralized view of the Internet in which digital information runs along well-laid channels. Why, in fact, did this particular story diffuse like it did, and does its particular circulation pattern hold any generalizable lessons about the movement of news and information in the emerging networked news ecosystem? The movement of news in this story must, in part, be explained by drawing attention to an emerging category of "fact entrepreneurs" that populate the digital media sphere. At the same time, the diffusion of local news can be partially explained through a focus on the practice of occupational misrecognition on the part of institutional actors in digital space.

The circulation of information about the Francisville Four in Philadelphia cannot be attributed to either a spontaneous or a structuralized movement of digital facts; rather, it was part of a savvy media campaign mounted by activists and their political allies, a campaign that included such old media techniques as sending out press releases and calling a press conference. Far from information in the Philadelphia news ecosystem emerging and circulating spontaneously, activists and their media outlets engaged in a rather old-fashioned process of "working the press" in order to realize their political objectives. "The blogs didn't turn this into a story," a *Philadelphia Daily News* editor involved in the decision-making process told me. "But I do think the blogs helped mobilize a community, which gave this story the viral nature it needed to make an impression on us" (interview with editor, July 14, 2008).

Political activists were not the only ones "working the press," however. Reporters with the *City Paper* made efforts to "market" their scoop about the Francisville Four to other journalists and news outlets; at the same time, bloggers with traditional and deinstitutionalized media outlets engaged in similar forms of entrepreneurship. Just as activists and "alternative journalists" saw members of the online media sphere as *targets* for political action and intervention, bloggers and less ideological online media saw members of the online media sphere as *potential sources and drivers of links and attention*. In short, both activists and journalists were united by their growing awareness of the online "attention economy." In sum, there are an increasing number of fact entrepreneurs operating within traditional media space. Beyond activists with political goals, some of these fact entrepreneurs now include journalists themselves.

While this growth in fact entrepreneurship blurs the original distinction between journalists and other online media actors, other forms of classificatory misrecognition may tend

to "resort" institutions back into more traditional occupational categories, thus counterbalancing this concurrent mixing of roles. As used here, the word "misrecognition" refers less to deliberate ignorance than it does to a tendency for one set of actors in the news sphere to categorize other sets of actors differently than these actors might categorize themselves. Often, this misrecognition tends to relegate other news actors into roles that are the most familiar or useful to those who are interacting with them. For those traditional journalists who were reporting on the Francisville Four, other online media makers were seen as sources rather than as fellow journalists engaged in a dynamic process of symbolic or cultural competition. Journalists reporting the Francisville Four story did not see the actors in the blogosphere as a *threat* to their status within the journalistic "field"; rather, for a journalist trained in traditional reporting techniques, all online actors look like sources and can be evaluated according to the criteria by which a reporter judges a source.

In the same manner, the bloggers who elaborated on the initial reporting of newspaper journalists saw these digital producers as, simply, the producers of linkable content. For the blogs, news reporting was content that could be linked to, dissected, criticized, praised, or elaborated upon. For these bloggers, the digital universe appeared particularly flat: there were a series of content producers, a set of links, some interesting personalities, and some good (or bad) writers. All could be linked to—or not, as the case may be. For activists, finally, the news sphere consisted of a series of *targets*, to be acted upon in order to advance a particular agenda and to be used in order to mobilize support and leverage action. Activists concerned with mobilizing support for the Francisville Four saw both journalists and bloggers less as content producers than digital targets, objects around which action could be mobilized and structured. Just as bloggers tended to flatten the digital field into a series of "linkable" Web sites, so activists also flattened the complex Philadelphia media sphere.

The analysis presented here does not pretend to be the final word in our understanding of how local news circulates in the emerging digital media ecosystem. Just the opposite, in fact: As American newspapers increasingly disappear or are at least partially supplemented by a growing number of online alternatives, much more research into how news is originated, processed, and circulated is necessary. This article has documented the diffusion of one such story. It has argued that the information that made up this story tended to follow the path hypothesized by Benkler—a path of iterative pyramiding—but also that the information was pushed forward by a set of quasi-institutionalized digital actors acting in their own organizational interest. It can be concluded that the complex local media sphere was categorized and recategorized by these actors differently, depending on their own position within the media system. Whether the patterns documented in this particular case are ultimately generalizable or simply represent an idiosyncratic example can only be determined through further research. It is hoped, however, that this research will pay as much attention to the circulation of news as it currently does to that news' production.

Notes

1. Over the course of this article, coverage of the Francisville Four by local TV can be characterized as the "dog that didn't bark." Local TV outlets did not pick the Francisville incident up as a story. I briefly discuss why this might have been later in the article.

2. In this article, my attribution policy is as follows: All individuals are either identified by pseudonyms or are treated anonymously, unless I am discussing their authorship of stories (news reports, blogposts, etc.) in which they are identified and that are in the public domain. For example, the author of a private e-mail would be anonymous, as would an editor discussing general news

policy, and a journalist discussing work published under his or her own byline would be identified by name.

    3. A pseudonym.

    4. A pseudonym.

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