

Blogging With Authority: Strategic Positioning in Political Blogs

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Blogs have quickly become prominent parts of the Internet landscape. Attention has largely been focused on a small subset of blogs — the politically-oriented filter blog. This paper examines four of the most-noticed blogs: Andrew Sullivan's *The Daily Dish*, Mickey Kaus's *Kausfiles*, Glenn Reynolds' *InstaPundit*, and Joshua Micah Marshall's *Talking Points Memo*. Using a grounded, qualitative technique, I analyze the methods these bloggers use to cast themselves as authoritative commentators in the world of politics. We find that their authority is largely staked out through their assertions of differences from journalism and of commonality with the audience. Concluding remarks explore the tension between bloggers and journalists and suggest that the success of these bloggers has much to do with how they have managed to position themselves rhetorically.

Introduction

The advent and popularization of blogging has generated a wide discussion of the meaning of blogs to interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and political participation. Users have adapted blogs to a vast array of uses, resulting in a diverse set of practices subsumed under the rubric of "blogging." Though blogs cannot be sorted into perfectly distinct categories, it is safe to say that the blogs dedicated to commentary on political issues and current events have established themselves as a relatively discrete genre. Recent research on these kinds of blogs offers no shortage of names for these blogs. Xenos (2008, p. 485), Wallsten (2005, p. 567), as well as Coleman and White (2008, p. 1) call them "political blogs." Tremayne, Zheng, Lee, and Jeong (2006, p. 290) refer to them as "filter blogs." Banning and Sweetser apply the term "media blog" (2007, p. 451) to this phenomenon. Lucas Graves goes with "news-related blogs" (2007, p. 331). Elite blogs of this type are often called "A-list" blogs (e.g., Adamic & Glance, p. 1; Ackland, p. 1; Trammell & Keshelashvili, p. 968). For my purposes here, I will use the term "political blog" to refer to this category of blogging.

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Scholars have dedicated a large amount of attention to political blogs. Some examine the political implications of the technical aspects of blogging, treating the blog as a technology. Lucas Graves (2007), for instance, suggests how the “affordances” of blogging — “reader input, fixity, and juxtaposition” (p. 342) — shape (but do not determine) the practices of blogging, setting into motion an inter-braiding of technology and culture.

Of the numerous interesting questions that present themselves when considering the contours of blogging, one important set of issues involves how bloggers — and in particular, political bloggers — position themselves as authoritative. After all, the challenge that faces political bloggers involves why anyone should believe them, as opposed to the mainstream media or other bloggers. This puts political bloggers in the position of having to set themselves apart as somehow more authoritative than those with whom they compete for attention and credibility. That is my central concern here: how some political bloggers claim authority for themselves — and for bloggers in general — via their online communication, and how this positioning, in terms of authority, was at work as these bloggers attained prominence in the early days of political blogging.

Questions about credibility and authority have been a major theme in the research about political blogs and others. Some researchers have assessed audience perceptions of blogger credibility using online surveys, focusing on relationships between perceived credibility, fairness, and depth of information (Sweetser et al., 2008; Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008). Surveying audience members is not the only way to understand blogs’ authority and/or credibility. Much research on blogs points to the discursive strategies at work in blogs. In his consideration of journalism blogs, Matheson drew on the ideas of Michel Foucault (1989) to explain how “[n]ews discourse can be seen as a particular instance of the more general ‘will to truth’ which motivates and constrains institutional forms of knowing in modern society” (2004, p. 445). From this point of view, bloggers as well as traditional journalists use particular discursive strategies to “sort events and statements as newsworthy or not, bring them into language, position audiences and justify all these actions as authoritative, truthful and, in other ways, effective” (Matheson, p. 445). Thus, political blogs represent a new iteration of this will to truth, employing distinct discursive rules.

Maratea (2008) hints at just such a discursive approach by treating the blogosphere as a public arena. Describing the “claims-making process” (p. 139) at work in social problems formation, Maratea notes that “the ability to develop a significant level of trust and credibility within the blogosphere is likely an important prerequisite to a blog achieving elite status” (p. 145). How can this trust and credibility be established? Drawing on Goffman’s (1959) ideas, Trammell and Keshelashvili suggest in their analysis of “A-list blogs” that these blogs “[display] a high level of self-revelation in regards to their identity” (2005, p. 975), and their analysis indicates that this is a strategic practice of self-revelation, motivated at least in part by concerns relating to authority. Wall aligned blogging with journalism and posits that political blogs represent an adjustment of existing journalistic norms in which blogs are “perceived as credible” in part because “bloggers see audiences as supporters and even peers” (2005, p. 165).

A concern with how political bloggers stake claims to authority must account for the field of ideas in which these bloggers operate. Because political bloggers refer frequently to journalism (and are often

journalists themselves), it is not surprising to find that considerable research has dealt with how journalism has adjusted to the blogosphere. Mark Deuze (2003) situated political blogs in the context of online journalism, locating them "somewhere between index and comment sites," (p. 209) and classified them in the realm of online "journalisms." Deuze is not alone in this. Drezner and Farrell observed that "[b]logs are becoming more influential because they affect the content of international media coverage" and that a "few elite blogs have emerged as aggregators of information and analysis, enabling media commentators to extract meaningful analysis and rely on blogs to help them interpret and predict political developments" (2004, p. 34). They concluded that the "blogosphere . . . acts as a barometer for whether a story would or should receive greater coverage by the mainstream media" (2004, p. 37). Lawson-Borders and Kirk noted that "bloggers opened doors and created pockets of public opinion that pressured the mainstream into assessing the validity of stories the dominant parties and candidates might be tempted to suppress" (2005, p. 550). A careful analysis by Jason Gallo (2004) suggested that one of the important results of political blogs is that they create a "real-time virtual feedback loop that disrupts the temporality of the traditional news cycle." Empirical studies of the relationships between blogs and mainstream journalism have addressed agenda setting effects between them, as in Wallsten's study that concluded that blog coverage and mainstream media share a reciprocal relationship wherein "media coverage was followed by more discussion in the blogosphere, and more discussion in the blogosphere was followed by more media coverage" (2007, p. 580). Evidence of mutual influence is also apparent in the work of Adamic and Glance, who found that left-wing and right-wing bloggers cite the mass media quite frequently (2005, p. 10).

The relationship between blogs and journalism is often understood to involve competition. Political bloggers are often seen as parasitizing on journalism. Dave Winer, for instance, has argued that blogs will revolutionize journalism, because the "Web has taught us to expect more information, not less." Established journalism has to learn "how to remain relevant to a population that can do for themselves what the big publications won't" (2002, quoted in Ruggiero & Winch, 2004). There is certainly evidence that journalists are concerned with the considerable attention that bloggers have received. By 2004, 9% of Internet users surveyed by the Pew Research Center "said they read political blogs 'frequently' or 'sometimes' during the 2004 campaign" (2005). Maratea points to how blogs' "speed of transmission" allows bloggers to "make far more claims public faster than would otherwise be possible" (2008, p. 144). Matheson (2004) notes that weblogs are often considered as a "challenge to corporate journalism," and this emphasis can be found in Bruns's assertion that, "at least at present, citizen journalists and news bloggers are substantially more predisposed towards engaging in a distributed process of correspondence aimed towards the continuing evaluation of news than are their industrial counterparts" (2008, p. 83). Singer casts bloggers and journalists as rivals, filling "sometimes-overlapping but essentially different niches in the information environment" (2006, p. 26). For Singer, "[w]e need the two sets of independent — in the best senses of the word — voices offering us alternative, complementary paths to truth" (2006, p. 30).

The rivalry between blogs and journalism is helpfully addressed through consideration of the twinned issues of authority and credibility. One of the things that makes political blogging controversial is the sense that it involves a new configuration of authority that challenges the existing and taken-for-granted authoritative roles in older media. In pursuit of this issue, Carlson addressed "the public reaction

from within the traditional journalism sphere to the legitimacy and credibility of the role of blogs in political coverage" (2007, p. 264). Taking blogs as a threat to their own authority, journalists responded by "invoking professionalism, closing off boundaries, and advancing democratic norms" (2007, p. 265). Journalists mocked the bloggers' "lack of constraining routines" and "plurality," and dismissed blogs as "faddish and of little value" (2007, p. 274). This picture of political bloggers and journalists competing for authority can be found at work in Lowrey and Anderson's (2005) suggestion, itself based on Abbott's (1988) ideas, that perceptions of blogger credibility will inevitably challenge journalists' long-standing claims to authority; blogger credibility exists in a system where journalists also compete. As Singer (2003) pointed out, Matt Drudge and other commentators who are "lumped together with online journalism [have] become the poster child for a culture of argumentation," a culture that "runs directly counter to the notion of professionalism in that it specifically devalues expertise by placing a premium on newness and controversy rather than on public service" (Singer, 2003, p. 153). Political bloggers are cast as emerging competitors in an already crowded field of roles seeking authority on political matters.

This issue of authority has been theorized extensively. Frequently, authority has been described in terms of how it can be possessed by, or embodied in, social actors, as in Max Weber's description of rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional authority, though Weber himself made it quite clear that he was talking about "claims to legitimacy" (1968/1978, p. 215) and not possessions per se. Building on this sense of claiming legitimacy, Pierre Bourdieu described how authorized language derives its power from the social conditions of its origin (1991, p. 107). He offered the metaphor of a "field" of position-takings in which issues such as authority are played out. Authority can here be considered as a strategy, shaped by the position in the field that the speaker occupies (1993, p. 45). In the case of the political blogger, we find a case of an emergent position within a field of commentators, with its own emergent set of strategies for staking out authority.

Bloggers who comment on politics find themselves in a field of political commentary that puts them in competition (and occasional collaboration) with a number of other professional and quasi-professional roles, including journalists, pundits, and politicians. As a result of this competition, the emergence of the blogger role has generated reactions from members of the press, and prompted bloggers themselves to reflect a great deal on their own place in political commentary. The role of "blogger" remains a relatively free-floating designation, and the job of fixing how and why we should believe what the bloggers have to say remains incomplete. While journalists and doctors do not have to begin their communiqués with an explanation of their own familiar and routinized claims to authority, political bloggers spent their formative years explicitly addressing their own authority.

Of course, journalists have developed a broad range of techniques for asserting authority. Schudson (1995) described how "[c]ontemporary quoting practices lend authority to journalists as a group" (p. 92). Eason (1986) showed how reporters seek to preserve journalistic authority in their responses to scandals involving reporters. Barbie Zelizer described how journalists assert authority through synecdoche, where "journalists . . . borrow the authority accrued from having covered certain events and apply it to events they did not experience" (1992, p. 37). Zelizer also addresses how journalists assert authority through the stories they tell about their own involvement with events (1992) via the practice of "credentialing" some participants into and out of authoritative roles (1992, pp. 204-

206), and through subtle indications of the journalists own proximity to events in the news (1990). We can notice how political bloggers have borrowed some similar techniques for insinuating themselves into authoritative positions regarding politics and current events, even to the point where, as Robinson (2006) pointed out, these bloggers have prompted journalists themselves to create j-blogs that respond to the introduction of blogging in a manner that both adjusts and reasserts classic models of journalistic authority.

By combining these insights concerning authority, we can see how the political bloggers lay claim to shared and individual authority in the statements they offer about themselves, each other, the idea of blogging, and the world of journalism. The emergent role of the blogger qua political commentator prompts questions about why anyone would believe these individuals. The bloggers considered here addressed this question regarding their own authority largely through implicit demonstrations of their own place in the field of political commentary.

These ideas regarding authority lead me to formulate the following research questions:

RQ1: What authoritative strategies can be found at work in the posts of the political bloggers as they established themselves in the early days of political blogging?

Furthermore, because political blogging is not carried out in a commentary vacuum, it is worth asking:

RQ2: How did political bloggers initially situate themselves vis-à-vis other parts of the field of commentary, such as academics, journalists, and writers?

Methodology

To generate a small sample of political blogs to analyze, I performed a rudimentary content analysis of stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to see which political blogs were most frequently mentioned. A sample of news stories was obtained by using Nexis to search for the terms "blog" and "weblog" from January 1, 2002, through December 31, 2003. This yielded a sample of 233 total stories (149 from *The New York Times*, and 84 from *The Washington Post*), and 336 unique blog mentions (215 from the *NYT* and 121 from the *WP*).¹ Two coders analyzed this sample of stories, noting the number of times each individual blog was mentioned. Intercoder reliability (n = 48 stories, 72 blog mentions) for identification of blog mentions was quite high, with intercoder agreement at 97.22% for identification of bloggers mentioned in the sample.

¹ The coders for this project used the following operational definition of a journalistic blog mention: A reference to a specific blog that is implicitly or explicitly referred to as a blog. This only includes blogs that can be identified from the information given in the story. Blogs that are hinted at do not count. Mentions of "Blog directories" do not count as blog mentions, nor do "Blog tools."

The results from this small coding project point to something familiar in the study of journalism: the tendency to rely on a small number of elite sources. Whereas almost every blog that received attention in the two papers was mentioned only once, a small number of blogs were mentioned on numerous occasions. The most noticed blog of all was that of then-U.S. presidential candidate Howard Dean, which received 17 unique mentions (eight in *The Post* and nine in *The Times*). After Dean, the next four most frequently mentioned blogs were: Andrew Sullivan's *The Daily Dish* at <http://www.andrewsullivan.com> (12 unique mentions), Glenn Reynolds' <http://www.instepundit.com> (seven unique mentions), Joshua Micah Marshall's <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com> (six unique mentions), and Mickey Kaus's <http://www.kausfiles.com> (six unique mentions). After these five blogs, the most number of unique mentions received by any blog was three, shared by a number of blogs. The rest of the blogs were mentioned once or twice.

Excluding Howard Dean as a political candidate (and not a political commentator per se). I have chosen the four standouts in the number of news mentions — Sullivan, Kaus, Marshall, and Reynolds — for further study here. That these four bloggers were mentioned the most times in the sample of news stories chosen does not tell us much about them. I chose this method of selecting a subset of political bloggers — finding the stand-out bloggers in terms of newspaper mentions — because it is a convenient way of singling out exemplars of bloggers whose work has been deemed by the press to be worth mentioning. In and of itself, this method of selecting a sample of political blogs tells us almost nothing about the effects of the authority of these bloggers. It is simply a convenient way to see which bloggers are competing for authority in the broad field of commentary that includes blogging and journalism. In other words, I am not asserting here that it is something about the authoritative appeals made by these four bloggers in the relatively early days of blogging that caused them to become important. No such causal connection should be inferred from this sampling technique or from any other part of my subsequent analysis.

I chose two years of blog content as the data for this analysis. This two-year period included every post in these four blogs from January 1, 2002, through December 31, 2003. This time period was chosen because it gave me a large amount of data to examine, while also allowing me to focus specifically on a period of particular importance to the bloggers, as this two-year period witnessed the emergence of blogging as a topic of interest in the mass media. In short, this was the time when the authority of political bloggers was very clearly in the process of being worked out. During this time period, the bloggers themselves were concerned largely with addressing the question of why anyone should read them or care about what they had to say.

Significantly, three of the four bloggers selected for this study had substantial experience in journalism before creating their blogs. Joshua Micah Marshall has been an associate editor for *The American Prospect* and a columnist for *The Hill*. Mickey Kaus is well known for his book *The End of Equality* and has also worked as a journalist for *Newsweek*, *Washington Monthly*, and *The New Republic*. Andrew Sullivan was a prominent and controversial editor at *The New Republic* before starting his blog. Glenn Reynolds is the only one of the four bloggers here with no significant experience in journalism; he is a professor of law at the University of Tennessee.

The method of textual analysis pursued here is quite similar to the familiar "grounded theory" method. In keeping with grounded theory, "the categories are discovered by examination of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Instead of testing for the existence of pre-defined categories, I allowed the categories to emerge from the data. My assessment of these blog posts comes from a thorough read of all blog posts by these four cited political bloggers in this period, which comprised several thousand pages of writing. On top of this, I paid careful attention to "negative cases" — those that conflicted with patterns that had begun to emerge. These negative cases become worthwhile parts of the analysis in and of themselves and also help to prevent me from developing an over-simplified model of blogger authority.

Bloggers: In Their Own Words

My goal here is to understand how these bloggers claimed certain positions in the field of social commentary. It is largely through the implicit work of positioning themselves discursively that they have managed to earn whatever place in journalism and popular culture that they have today. Commentary dedicated to this positioning makes up a considerable portion of what bloggers have to say. This is particularly true about the four bloggers analyzed here. Attention to the bloggers' own descriptions of themselves and of other commentators gives us cues to what kind of authority the bloggers claim for themselves.

Slogans

One simple way to understand how these bloggers staked authority is to look at their respective slogans. Their slogans were a basic element in the strategic positioning at work in the creation of a political blog. Glenn Reynolds's blog at instapundit.com bore the slogan "If you've got a modem, I've got an opinion," which played up Reynolds' populism and demonstrated his attempt to establish himself as open to anyone who wants to read his ideas. Andrew Sullivan's former slogan — "The revolution will be blogged" — for The Daily Dish was even more direct. Mickey Kaus considered both "What doesn't crash my server, makes me stronger," (quoted in Reynolds, August 1, 2002) and "Friendless, Therefore Fearless" (Kaus, May 11, 2002) as possible slogans. The point of these slogans, as is commonly found in political blogs, was to make the case that the information found on these blogs was more legitimate because it comes not from a large news organization but from an individual who is simply speaking his (ostensibly revolutionary) mind. A common theme here is the emphasis on their authors' independence from "big media." The reader is led to understand that this is not just news or commentary; it is content that could not be found in the newspaper or watching television. As these slogans played up the bloggers' independence from established journalism, they also echoed the slogans found on newspaper mastheads across the world. In this sense, the slogans hinted at a persistent feature of political blogs: an ambivalence vis-à-vis journalism. As we will see, these bloggers frequently cast themselves as brutal critics of the press, but also as legitimate heirs to certain traditions in journalism.

Journalism as Antipode

A widespread pattern that emerged from the study of these four blogs was the bloggers' criticism of journalists, news organizations, and the media at large. Rarely did a day pass in the two years under

consideration here without a critical word about how news was being reported. This criticism of journalism demonstrates a tendency to differentiate blogs from journalism in order to generate a rebel authority for themselves. These critical remarks directed at journalism were numerous enough to display a wide variety of tendencies, within and between these four blogs.

These four bloggers often aimed their barbs at individual journalists. This frequently took the form of "Fisking" (engaging in a point-by-point rebuttal of) journalists, or of linking to other bloggers who have posted their own critiques. The term "Fisking" owes its name to the UK Guardian journalist Robert Fisk whose journalistic output was a frequent target. Glenn Reynolds criticized Fisk a great deal, at one point observing that "what's pathetic is just how obvious it is that Fisk (1) has lost touch with reality; and (2) is basically rooting for the other side" in the struggle against terrorism (December 1, 2002). Reynolds frequently criticized *New York Times* columnists Maureen Dowd and Paul Krugman, at one time opining that "Krugman's hope that a second Great Depression would sweep Bush out of office has been too transparent not to mock. While I generally leave serious Krugman-mockery to the pros, like [bloggers] Kaus and Luskin, I can't resist an occasional jab" (October 31, 2003). As this last remark indicates, Reynolds was often content simply to link to other sources; his blog was a veritable sea of links to bloggers whose ideas he endorsed.

Other bloggers here were also likely to take on specific journalists. Andrew Sullivan criticized and/or linked to others who criticized: Bill Moyers (December 28, 2003), Maureen Dowd (November 22, 2003; September 3, 2003; June 25, 2003; May 30, 2003; May 23, 2003), Paul Krugman (November 21, 2003; October 16, 2003), then-*New York Times* editor Howell Raines (July 9, 2003; May 28, 2003; May 12, 2003; February 24, 2003; May 24, 2002; May 14, 2002), and Nicholas Kristof (October 4, 2002). The focus of these critiques of journalists often revolved around the factuality of what the journalists said. Sullivan asserted that Dowd had a "propensity to deceive" (May 30, 2003), and that Howell Raines, "rather than change, or admit his crusading left-liberalism . . . wants to smear the critics. He's still part of the problem, isn't he?" (February 24, 2003). Sullivan repeatedly referred to journalists, almost always to criticize them. Here it is worth pointing out how, in these antagonistic references to individual journalists, the bloggers elided any distinctions between reporters, editors, columnists, and pundits. Any association with established journalism seems to have been enough to make these figures targets.

A tendency to snipe at specific journalists can also be found in the blogs of Mickey Kaus and Joshua Micah Marshall. Kaus took on columnist David Broder (October 12, 2003), CBS reporter Mark Phillips (August 20, 2003), *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne (August 18, 2003), Howell Raines (July 12, 2003; June 10, 2003; June 3, 2003; May 11, 2003; January 16, 2003; December 6, 2003), *New York Times* columnist William Safire (June 3, 2003), and reporter Adam Nagourney (November 6, 2002). Joshua Micah Marshall took on *New York Times* columnists David Brooks (December 9, 2003) and William Safire (October 6, 2003; September 21, 2003; July 21, 2003; June 1, 2003; April 3, 2003), *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller (July 2, 2003), *National Review Online's* Cliff May (September 29, 2003), syndicated columnist George Will (April 27, 2003; November 27, 2002), the *New York Post's* Daniel Pipes (March 20, 2003), *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer (December 3, 2002), the *Weekly Standard's* Fred Barnes (August 16, 2002), and *CMN's* Lou Dobbs (March 1, 2002). Again, these critiques took the form of brief, often sarcastic takes on what these journalists wrote or said. Kaus addressed the

controversy surrounding *New York Times* reporter Rick Bragg in 2003 by saying that he “stopped reading him long ago, about the time I realized that any article carrying his byline would, more likely than not, be the Platonic ideal of Timesian condescension” (May 30, 2003). Marshall offered similarly spirited jabs at specific journalists. In one post, he addressed a newspaper article that he suspected involved too much pro-Bush spin; Marshall noted, “I sincerely hope the author of this article in today’s *Boston Globe* gets all the calls returned at the White House for a good long time. Because, boy, did he earn it” (August 28, 2003). Criticism of individual journalists was a near-constant part of blogging during 2002-2003.

In addition to their steady criticism of individual journalists, these four bloggers also spent much time critiquing news outlets, in particular the elite U.S. newspapers. All four blogs here treated *The New York Times* as the most important outlet to critique. Reynolds was most likely to link to other blogs or journalists who found problems with *The Times*, while writing in small comments of his own. In one post, Reynolds linked to a story about *The Times*, adding: “Another conflict of interest at the New York Times. What are these guys, the Arthur Andersen of journalism?” (February 7, 2002). Reynolds also took on *The Nation* (March 22, 2002) and the BBC, which he found to be biased, and which he referred to as “slow, but educable” (December 2, 2003). Andrew Sullivan joined in, suggesting that the BBC was biased against the War in Iraq by referring to the network as the “Baathist Broadcasting Corporation” (December 20, 2003), and the “Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation” (June 11, 2003). Sullivan found problems at *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*, both of which, he argued, took positive economic news, and “[did] their best to bury and downplay the news” (October 31, 2003). *The New York Times* continued to be a favorite target of Sullivan’s gibes, as when he posted that “what’s dismaying is the sheer reckless condescension of the rhetoric...It’s ugly and it’s cheap. And it’s getting uglier and cheaper all the time” (March 11, 2003). Notice here that, as with Reynolds, it is bias that is the cudgel with which to attack established journalism.

Of the four bloggers analyzed here, Mickey Kaus was the most likely to attend to developments in Western U.S. newspapers, including the *Sacramento Bee* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He consistently found bias in the *Los Angeles Times*’ coverage of the California gubernatorial recall in 2003 — against Arnold Schwarzenegger and for Gray Davis — an opinion he expressed in a post that suggested, on the day Schwarzenegger was elected, that the *Times* headline for the results would be “SCHWARZENEGGER ELECTED; DAVIS AIDES INCREASINGLY CONFIDENT” (October 7, 2003). Many of Kaus’ other criticisms of news outlets were directed at *The New York Times*, as when he asked, “When is Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico a hard line conservative? When *The New York Times Magazine* needs to hype a story (on Domenici’s support for mental health parity) for its apparently uninformed readership, to whom almost any mainstream Republican seemingly is hard line” (September 16, 2002).

Joshua Micah Marshall also took the opportunity to attack news organizations. He took issue with *The New York Times*, though rather less than Kaus, Sullivan, and Reynolds. Most notably, Marshall engaged in an ill-tempered dispute with *The Washington Post*, after it used the name of Marshall’s blog (*Talking Points Memo*) for one of its online columns. In response, Marshall wondered in his blog, “What gives? The corporate media behemoth can just run roughshod over the small independent?” (August 9, 2002). In another post, he took issue with a *Washington Times* article by asking, “Who edited this article exactly? . . . A monkey? . . . An iguana? . . . A field mouse? . . . If DC’s going to have a right-wing attack-dog sheet, can’t it be a good one?” (April 9, 2002).

Much as they criticize individual journalists and news organizations, these bloggers also criticized "the media" and journalism more broadly. Their commentary involved a sense that the mass media — often called "big media" — were too big to be responsive to the public's needs. Reynolds, for instance, suggested that "professional courtesy among media barons" prevented the major media from paying attention to Ted Turner's attempt to obtain land held by a group of slave descendants against their will (July 29, 2002). Reynolds asserted that "the concentrated political power of Big Media is a threat" (May 22, 2003), and he argued that local blogging will increase in the future, partly "because local newspapers, almost always monopolists and often with too-comfortable relations with local politicians, are ripe targets" (June 20, 2003). Blogs would also give readers "some news that isn't getting reported in the Big Media" (August 12, 2003). Commenting on how the mass media focused intently on the Schwarzenegger candidacy in the California gubernatorial recall and election, Reynolds mused that Bush could benefit from this attention to Schwarzenegger. As Reynolds said, "That's the good news for Bush: The media may be dumb and negative, but at least they're easily distracted!" (August 12, 2003).

Andrew Sullivan was particularly pointed in his criticism of the media. He posited that established media organizations were slow to adjust and quick to find fault with their betters. At one point, he defended Matt Drudge by asking, "Why do the old media never give him credit when he does journalism as well as any of them?" (November 5, 2003). Frustrated by media reports about President Bush's claims regarding Iraqi attempts to obtain uranium from Africa, Sullivan urged his readers to send him media mentions of these claims, proclaiming, "If we can't stop them spreading untruths, [sic] we can at least monitor them" (October 6, 2003). Sullivan insisted that he was not simply beholden to one side of the political fence, and he described himself as "always banging on about liberal media bias . . . But then there's dumb-ass conservative media bias," which he found in media coverage of drugs (May 17, 2002).

Overall, Mickey Kaus was less likely to take on "the media" per se; only rarely did Kaus make any such statement. Joshua Micah Marshall, meanwhile, maintained a critical take on the media. Much of his criticism concerned the press. Neoconservative political tricks, he said, were "abetted by a lazy press corps" (December 11, 2003), and he kept track of how the "right-wing trashing machine" (December 4, 2002) turned a John Kerry haircut into a political issue. He expressed disappointment that "soon enough this will all become a talking point for Matthews, Russert, et al. Watch how it happens" (December 2, 2002). Marshall was particularly concerned with what he called "Op-Ed payola," where op-ed pieces are "produced in lobbying chop-shops." These pieces make it into regional papers, where they "apparently either don't know about this or don't care" (March 7, 2002).

Though these critiques of journalism and of "big media" were plentiful in all four of the blogs analyzed here, there was still some variance between them. Joshua Micah Marshall was noticeably less likely to critique specific journalists, while Glenn Reynolds and Andrew Sullivan made it a near-constant part of their writing. This antipathy toward journalism set up an important part of the authoritative stance of these political blogs. Through stated opposition to certain individuals and tendencies in journalism and the media, the bloggers made themselves out to be free agents, utterly unconcerned with anything but truth. To understand more about how journalism was matched up with blogging, we now turn to how these bloggers described blogging itself.

Bloggers on Blogging

In opposition to the tendencies of the "big media" contenders, the bloggers positioned themselves as free-floating commentators, immune to the deficiencies that plague modern journalism and able to command the high ground of political discourse. Blogs and blogging were frequent topics in these blogs, as the novelty of the medium seemed to demand some kind of explanation. Through descriptions of blogging, these four bloggers addressed the issue of their own authority. These bloggers described blogging as a liberated form of commentary, and as something better than journalism. They asserted that blogs were capable of making an impact, and they identified milestones in the short history of blogging. In all of this, they spelled out implicitly and explicitly why bloggers like themselves deserved to be read and trusted.

A major theme in the bloggers' descriptions of blogs was the idea of blogging as a relatively liberated activity. Glenn Reynolds described blogging as "a labor of love. It's free. And it'll stay that way" (December 21, 2002). For Reynolds, blogging was "a hobby, not a job" (July 8, 2002), a "personal vehicle," and "[i]f you disagree, get your own" (April 8, 2002). One "advantage of the blogosphere," claimed Sullivan, is that "We don't give a damn. And by and large, we say what we believe" (December 10, 2002). Mickey Kaus was more sarcastic, praising blogs for how they lent themselves to unrestrained, quick opinions. As he put it, "Why make two phone calls before producing a column? Isn't that overdoing it? One is surely sufficient. And if you become a blogger, you can do even better than that!" (August 15, 2003). He suggested that "half the point of blogging [is] to publish half-cocked paranoid theories that pop into your mind in the middle of the night" (April 2, 2003). Marshall was more reserved, but generally agreed, suggesting that "one of the unique things — possibly one of the lamest things about 'blogs' . . . is that you can start commenting on a topic before you've really pulled together all the information or even decided quite what you think about it" (November 12, 2002). More forcefully, he asserted that "one of the great things about having a weblog is having a forum for expanding on points that must be dealt with briefly in conventional article writing" (May 29, 2002). All four bloggers gave voice to the idea that an advantage of blogging is the freedom that it represents. In these bloggers' own words, blogging was a completely liberated practice.

This freedom was placed in the context of journalism. These bloggers made blogs like their own out to be the antidote to the problems of journalism or "old media." Sullivan and Reynolds were particularly concerned with asserting the superiority of blogs over journalism. Sullivan found it important and significant that many blogs received more online hits than online versions of newspapers (e.g., June 10, 2003); Reynolds wrote that "ink-and-paper, updated once a week, will have trouble competing with the dynamism" of more blog-like news sources (December 3, 2002). In his widely read "blogger manifesto," Sullivan compared blogging to the popular peer-to-peer music file-sharing software Napster. After all, "just as Napster bypassed the record companies and brought music to people with barely any mediation, so Blogger bypassed established magazines, newspapers, editors and proprietors, and allowed direct peer-to-peer journalism to flourish" (February 24, 2002). After one *New York Times* correction took some time to be straightened out, Sullivan offered some perspective, noting that "most blogs correct themselves prominently within hours of finding out [about their error], and at most a day or two. Score

one for little media" (September 18, 2002). For Sullivan, blogging was clearly a form of journalism — "peer-to-peer journalism," if you will — while also being the opposite of journalism.

Other bloggers were somewhat less direct than Sullivan in asserting their superiority to journalism. Reynolds assigned himself to a merely complementary role in journalism, focusing on how much he simply linked to other stories, with minor comments. "Unlike old media," he wrote, "I link to it. Readers don't have to take my word. They can make up their own minds" (October 10, 2002). Kaus emphasized the relative quickness in blogs, noting that one "inherent advantage of blogs" might be "fewer cooks," because "editing is more likely to introduce distortions than eliminate them" (May 24, 2003). Bias in blogs is less problematic than bias in journalism, mused Reynolds, because:

. . . blogs aren't big shot media operations that claim to cover all the news that's fit to print and to do so (chortle) in an unbiased fashion, but rather personal operations run in someone's spare time, by people who have an axe to grind and plenty of fury to turn the wheel. (July 8, 2002)

Bloggers were different from journalists because the bloggers:

. . . write what they think. No sucking up to editors. No ass-kissing. No grim hanging-on—hell, these people are actually, and obviously having the times of their lives. And to add injury to insult, they're being noticed by the bigshots while you continue to toil in obscurity. The horror! The horror! I mean, a goddam Air Force mechanic is getting more buzz than guys like [journalist Tim] Cavanaugh. (Reynolds, January 18, 2002)

Again: blogging was located as different from and better than, but still connected to, journalism.

These bloggers often portrayed their own and others' blogs as effective tools for changing the world and as prime movers in the world of setting the public and elite agenda. Reynolds suggested that changes in how the New York Times engaged in fact-checking might be attributable to blogs, joking that "maybe the blogosphere is having an impact!" (August 22, 2002). He compared bloggers to legendary activist/journalist I. F. Stone, noting that Stone is "a good example of how someone with strong ideas and a good style can have wildly disproportionate influence in relation to the number of subscribers" (April 5, 2002). Sullivan predicted that "many more will read [blogs] than write—and that's where much of the growth is, which is why Big Media will of course want to shift its strategy online to bring blogging to the mainstream" (November 21, 2003). "The revolution," said Sullivan, "may not be televised. But it sure will be blogged" (June 16, 2003). As an example of this, Sullivan pointed to Howell Raines' removal from the New York Times, observing that the "blogosphere in general created a growing chorus of criticism that helped create public awareness of exactly what Raines was up to . . . We did what journalists are supposed to do — and we did it to journalism itself" (June 6, 2003). His prediction was for more dramatic results from blogs: "First Lott. Then Raines. And you ain't seen nothing yet" (June 6, 2003). In a link to a story about women's blogs in Iran, Sullivan claimed that the "blogging revolution" was "undermining media tyrants. In Iran, it may be destabilizing real tyrants" (June 17, 2002). Sullivan asserted that "[w]hat bloggers do is break up smug monopolies, disperse editorial power and give unheard voices a chance to

get a megaphone. It seems to me only the truly insecure or untalented have anything to worry about" (April 9, 2002).

Mickey Kaus and Joshua Micah Marshall were more reserved about the potential of blogs; certainly, neither referred to a blog "revolution." After a consensus emerged that blogs were responsible for Trent Lott's being forced to step down from his position as Senate Majority Leader, Kaus asked, "Wouldn't Lott eventually have gotten into big trouble for his remarks even if they Web didn't exist?" (December 13, 2002). And Marshall — who was the individual blogger most likely to be credited with having preserved the Lott story — described the Lott fiasco in relatively mild terms. He cautioned against "blog triumphalism" (November 23, 2002). Both Kaus and Marshall were less concerned with the place of blogging generally and less likely to position blogging as something that would have a dramatic effect on the world, or on reporting.

Another level of blog awareness that comes through here is a tendency on the part of these bloggers to mark milestones in the development of blogging. Reynolds, for instance, described "the publication of a how-to book about blogging" as "an important milestone in the Blogosphere's development" (July 8, 2002). Sullivan called presidential candidate Howard Dean's use of the Web "a big deal" (November 24, 2003), and this was largely in keeping with Marshall's assessment of Dean (August 22, 2003). Sullivan noted when the Encyclopedia Britannica Almanac included an entry on blogs (November 12, 2003), and when the word "blog" was named the American Dialect Society's second favorite coinage of 2002 (January 9, 2003). He also commented on the significance of Mickey Kaus' blog being picked up as part of Slate (May 9, 2002), and speculated that "this election cycle (2004) will be the moment that blogs really hit the big time" (June 5, 2003). Kaus opined that "the blogging trend must be almost over when *Time Magazine* has a blog" (June 7, 2002). Marshall found it significant that there were conferences about blogging (November 23, 2002), and kept a close eye on how blogging and journalism fed on each other, noting that "[n]o sooner had I heard the news that" Mickey Kaus' blog was becoming part of Slate "than I got a call from a reporter at one of the New York dailies . . . asking me to comment on it" (May 10, 2002). Perhaps most significantly, Reynolds tracked the bloggers who "started a weblog because of InstaPundit." Upon reviewing this list of blogs, he exclaimed, "My mind is blown. Not just by the numbers (though there are a *lot* on the list) but also by the quality. There are lots of people on this list that I look up to, and it's quite amazing to me to see them as having started because of me." He then printed a lengthy list of all these blogs (April 7, 2002). This provided a sense that the blogosphere was growing rapidly and placed Reynolds' *InstaPundit* at the center of it.

Though there was something short of a unified front in support of the idea that blogging was a perfect tool for a democratic revolution, all four blogs did share a sense that blogging was important (i.e., worth discussing), novel, and somehow connected to an improvement in the state of commentary. These bloggers portrayed their own blogs as fonts of ideas, entirely unchained to bureaucracy, routine, or self-interest. The bloggers offered themselves as unrestrained answers to journalism, to be trusted precisely because of their lack of connection to existing institutions.

The Personal Touch

A less explicit feature of this blogging that relates to authority was the tendency for these bloggers to reveal backstage information about themselves. As Wall (2005) pointed out, bloggers of this sort "cultivate a relationship with the audience" (p. 163). Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) showed that this often involves a large amount of backstage information. This self-revelation often involved straightforward descriptions of private events. Sullivan often adopted a quite personal tone, as when he described: vacations in Provincetown, MA (e.g., August 4, 2003), his pet beagle (e.g., July 10, 2002), or getting sick after eating a "bad tuna sandwich" (April 25, 2002). Reynolds offered similar remarks on events in his life through descriptions of his family's Christmas morning (December 26, 2002), a mention of taking his daughter to Brownies (November 12, 2002), and an update on his father's health (September 14, 2003). It was also not uncommon to find postings that concerned the bloggers' opinions on matters utterly unrelated to the news, such as Reynolds' opinion on rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival (December 27, 2002), Joshua Micah Marshall's love of rock band Led Zeppelin (May 7, 2002), Andrew Sullivan's take on the Chicago Cubs (October 15, 2003), and Mickey Kaus's appraisal of the Nissan 350Z (November 18, 2002).

Some backstage information concerned the running of the blogs themselves. This occurred when the bloggers addressed their own absence from posting. For example, on one day, Reynolds posted: "for the many who emailed: Yeah, I took the day off. Posting will resume as normal late Sunday" (December 14, 2002). Similar explanations for light posting were frequent in Reynolds' work; he usually explained his absences, revealing his personal life when doing so. Joshua Micah Marshall offered the same kind of backstage explanations for light posting, often explaining absences and light-posting days through reference to his own work on a doctoral dissertation (e.g., March 18, 2003). Other backstage information regarding the working of the blogs often concerned technical information, such as Sullivan's description of Mac problems (September 24, 2002), Marshall's "beta-testing" of a redesigned version of his Web site at www.talkingpointsmemo.com (September 16, 2003), and e-mail system difficulties at Reynold's university (September 30, 2002).

In rare cases, bloggers' posts involved very personal information. Here, the pattern of self-revelation was sufficient to evoke a much more intimate tone. These kinds of ultra-personal posts were not frequent, but they highlight an important part of the authoritative space of the blogger. One such occasion occurred when Joshua Micah Marshall's observed that "Twenty-two years ago, late in the evening one night in March of 1981, to be specific, my mother was killed in an auto accident on Foothill Boulevard in a town called Claremont." He relayed the pertinent details of this accident and reflected on how this event affected him (June 14, 2003). A similar revelation of sorts occurred when Andrew Sullivan posted that "Tomorrow is my anniversary. Funny how it sneaks up on me. I mean the anniversary of testing HIV-positive" (June 22, 2002). He reflects at length on how he has dealt with HIV, and on how his diagnosis changed his life (June 22, 2002). As with Marshall's discussion of his mother's death, there is a break in frame here, where the self-revelatory aspects of blogging became an explicit part of the posting.

These posts highlighted how these blogs could operate in a manner similar to the far more common personal blogs, with their frequent emphasis on intimate details; at the same time, the rarity

with which such personal issues were discussed demonstrates that these blogs were very different from personal blogs. At the very least, we see (once again) something that demonstrates the difference between journalism and blogging.

Blurring the Lines Between Blogger and Audience

Self-revelation was not the only tool available to bloggers looking to establish a personal tone. The implicit sense of a connection to their audiences could also be found in the tendency of these bloggers to describe donations given to them (from readers) and to include readers' comments in their own blogs.

Donations to these bloggers could be sent through links on their Web sites. Glenn Reynolds and Andrew Sullivan both dedicated a great deal of attention to the amount of donations they received through this method. Sullivan was careful to describe how to give to him online, and he was successful at raising funds through his blog. He made donating to his blog a way to take a stand in the fight between established and independent media resources. "If you care about the site," he claimed, "the viability of blogging as a professional enterprise, and want to be a part of it, please throw a little change into the tip jar" (December 12, 2003). It was important to support *The Daily Dish*, said Sullivan, because he "rarely missed a day in the past 12 months . . . And I am not beholden to any big media entity. But that's why I need your support — to keep this site independent, aggressive, timely and indebted to no one but you" (December 9, 2003). Sullivan made a point of limiting these posts. Both Sullivan and Reynolds thanked their audience frequently when they received donations. Reynolds, for instance, posted one day that "the Paypal donations keep pouring in: Thanks, folks. It's not Andrew Sullivan-league, but it's much appreciated" (December 20, 2002). In terms of authority, these descriptions of donations point, once again, to a claimed alignment with the people. This was particularly true in Sullivan's blog, where the donations were made to seem to be a kind of strike against big media.

Another method through which the bloggers established a sense that they were connected to their audience was by describing comments they received from their audiences and by including audience members' comments into their blogs. This strategy allowed the bloggers to channel the words of their readers through the bloggers' own thoughts. With a characteristic enthusiasm for links, Glenn Reynolds was likely to pass along links that readers had sent to him, as when he wrote that "a reader sends this link to a story about Jimmy Carter questioning allegations about Cuban biological warfare research" (May 13, 2002). The most frequently used method of including reader commentary — used by all four bloggers studied here — was to point out that a reader had some comments, paste these comments into the blog post, and then respond to these comments in some way. For the most part, reader comments pasted into these blogs were supportive of the bloggers, or of their stated points of view. In other words, referring to a reader's comments usually meant putting a popular imprimatur on the blogger's opinion. Joshua Micah Marshall, for instance, posted that:

As a reader (Tom R.) wrote last night in an e-mail to TPM, the 'flypaper' theory makes as much sense as a public health director saying, 'By creating a dirty hospital, we're going to create a place where we can fight the germs on our own terms.' (July 28, 2003)

In the context of Marshall's blog, it was understood that this comment supported Marshall's established opposition to the "flypaper" theory of terrorism prevention.

Sullivan does something similar to this, but it more often takes the specific form of referring to his connection and devotion to his audience. As he put it on August 4, 2003, in a posting concerning gay marriage and the Catholic church, "From your e-mails, I know I am not in this alone, and I'll be praying hard for all of us in this storm, pro and con, to find God's will for us, whatever it is." Elsewhere, he described how he "just spent four hours reading your missives. So much extraordinary support, compassion, intellect, encouragement. Sometimes, this blog feels like a family. I'm awed and buoyed" (August 3, 2003). Sullivan often spends considerable time reflecting out loud on what he should and should not think and say. Frequently, he pasted an entire e-mail from a reader. The point of all this is consistent with Sullivan's goals in identifying himself within the blog "movement": he closed ranks with an audience to enlist them in his authority. His opposition to journalism is raised largely by channeling the voice of the "people." A close read of these postings makes clear his attempt to offer a more intimate, personal kind of authority in place of the impersonal authority of journalists (itself largely the result of the expectation of objectivity). What the bloggers asserted through use of readers' messages was that there was no difference between themselves and their audience.

Links to Other Blogs

A reverse image of how these bloggers view journalism and "big media" can be found in how they talk to and link to each other and to other bloggers. The blogs under focus here contained near-constant links and mentions of other bloggers. These mentions were mostly positive. Bloggers mentioned other bloggers when they found a point of agreement or wanted to give credit for the origin of an observation. This highlighted the bloggers' shared sensibility that the world of commentary could be divided into two major camps: big media journalism and blogging. This kind of linking behavior in political blogs has been studied carefully by social network researchers who have paid close attention to how blogs link to each other and to mainstream media sources. In this vein, Adamic and Glance (2005) demonstrated that liberal and conservative political blogs resemble each other in many respects, though conservative blogs link much more to each other than do liberal blogs, a finding reinforced by Robert Ackland's (2005) study using different data and methods. As in these studies, I find a tendency for ideologically oriented clumping that is accomplished through linking to other blogs.

Glenn Reynolds' *InstaPundit* was particularly likely to link to other blogs. Reynolds was likely to link to or cite bloggers such as Mickey Kaus, Andrew Sullivan, Matthew Hoy, Virginia Postrel, Natalija Radic, James Lileks, and Matt Welch. For Reynolds, these mentions were customarily short and approving. A link to James Lileks' blog, for instance, reads "GO READ LILEKS. Today's. Go ahead, I'll wait" (September 6, 2002). Frequently, the mention of another blogger would give a rudimentary sense of the content in the link, as when Reynolds posted links to Sullivan's *The Daily Dish* that read "Andrew Sullivan addresses Clinton's legacy post 9/11" (January 11, 2002) or "Andrew Sullivan writes that the flypaper strategy [in Iraq] is working" (September 7, 2003). More extensive quotations were also occasional features of Reynolds' blog. On rare occasions, Glenn Reynolds mentioned other bloggers' opinions on a third blogger, as when he posted (with a link to Kaus's site) that "Mickey Kaus says that Andrew Sullivan is

winning the PR war with Howell Raines" (May 14, 2002). Reynolds linked to other blogs very frequently in the two-year period under consideration.

The three other bloggers studied here also linked and mentioned other bloggers a great deal. Mickey Kaus often linked to and cited blogs by Eugene Volokh, Glenn Reynolds, Daniel Weintraub, Andrew Sullivan, Daniel Drezner, and Joshua Micah Marshall. Andrew Sullivan linked to and mentioned Joshua Micah Marshall, Mickey Kaus, and Glenn Reynolds. Joshua Micah Marshall linked to bloggers Ruy Teixeira, Juan Cole, and Mickey Kaus. As a rule, these mentions were positive. Frequently, the link to another blogger was explicitly intended to introduce a new blogger or a blogger who was not among the best known of the blogosphere, as when Andrew Sullivan linked to a "cool sports blog" (October 2, 2003), or when Joshua Micah Marshall encouraged his audience to "take a look at Noah Shachtman's new blog, *Defensetech.org*" (January 10, 2003). While all four of these blogs maintained so-called "blogrolls" (lists of links to other blogs), there were also cases where these bloggers would simply make a blog post that included numerous links to other blogs. Andrew Sullivan, for instance, devoted a post to "blogs worth reading," pointing the way to some of his favorite blogs, including some of the aforementioned blogs he was most likely to link to, as well as blogs by Norah Vincent, Eric Alterman, Brink Lindsey, John Ellis, and Julian Sanchez (September 3, 2002).

Considered from the point of view of authority, this near-constant linking between blogs accomplishes a great deal. Most obviously, it supports the sense that the blogosphere is comprised of something more than a number of disconnected individuals. As was the case in these bloggers' discussions of blogging and the blogosphere, there emerges a sense that blogging involves an authoritative community. That these four bloggers were also likely to link to each other set them apart from other bloggers; in what could be compared to Merton's "Matthew effect" (1968) regarding scientific prestige, the already well-known bloggers yielded disproportionate symbolic gains from linking to each other. The picture of the commentariat that one gets here usually involves the sense that there are two kinds of news sources: blogs (frequently referred to in the first person plural, as "we" or "us") and big media (to be distrusted, considered to be "them"). In keeping with this sense of a divide, Reynolds divided the links along the left side of his Web site into a section for "pure bloggers" and one for "big journalism."

Conclusion

What can we make of these bids for authority from an emergent group of commentators? Perhaps the most important theme here is that bloggers assert authority largely through opposing themselves to journalism. They are authorized, they seem to say, precisely because they are *not* journalists, and this independence is played off as if it makes them closer to the authentic needs of the audience. This rhetorical move can be compared with what Pierre Bourdieu has described as a "double-break" (1990, p. 150). When experts and professionals demonstrate their professional competence to be taken as authorities on a topic (as journalists do with the news), they assert a break with the audience. This is a single-break; the authority here comes from the recognition of the authority's relatively large amount of knowledge (the cognitive dimension of professional authority) in comparison to the audience's knowledge. A double-break, such as we find in the case of these bloggers, can be found when an authority claims to be separate from those who claim this difference of expertise. By taking on journalists and laying

claim to equality with the audience, the political bloggers construct a picture of the world that locates themselves on the side of their audience and against the journalists. Their distance from and opposition to professional journalism — made most clear in their postings — is construed to be a demonstration of their own authority to speak to their audience.

These bloggers highlight their own anti-professionalism, at least in part because it allows them to venture into discussions of any topic and claim a commonality with their audience (who are assumed to be non-professional). They play their cards as putative revolutionaries who represent the true voice of the people. This proximity to the people is consistent with the “double-break.” The extended use of reader’s comments within their own postings, and the revelation of the backstage elements of their own lives operate as cues to highlight their own distance from other experts and proximity to their audience. In other words, the root message of difference from other experts is paired with a basic, near-constant message of commonality with the audience. These bloggers offer opinions as if they were what their audience themselves would say, and then they often go one more step, contextualizing their own ideas in a chorus of like-minded readers’ comments.

The importance of this double-break should be contextualized within the world of journalism. The values that Singer (2003) describes as part of journalism’s professional face include concerns for accuracy and a correct judgment of newsworthiness. In the repeated dramas that have been spurred largely by political bloggers — such as the Jayson Blair scandal, when a *New York Times* reporter was found to have fabricated details in his stories — the political bloggers made themselves out to be even more professional than the journalists at prestigious newspapers. From their point of view in these affairs, they have been where journalism should have been all along, if it were doing its job. In other words, these bloggers distance themselves from journalism while laying claim to some of the ideals of journalism. This is perhaps not surprising, when one considers that three of these four bloggers (Sullivan, Marshall, and Kaus) were established journalists before (and during) their tenure as well-known bloggers. For these three, the blog medium allowed them to play the hybridized role of blogger-journalist and to position themselves as journalists and as anti-journalists, whichever suited their authoritative purposes at the time. Of course, this is not necessarily controversial. Many journalists — those who cover science beats come to mind — occupy positions at the intersections of two communities. “Journalist” has never been as distinct of a role as “basketball coach” or “anesthesiologist.” However, in the case of these three journalists who have turned to blogging, there seems to be both an enhanced self-consciousness — in which it is expected that the idea of blogging itself will be addressed to a great extent — as well as an enhanced ambivalence, wherein it is expected to distance oneself from journalism in order to preserve one’s authoritative face.

This double-break is not constant across these four blogs. What we can see in this small set of blogs is a rather wide continuum between positioning a blog as an ostensibly “direct” kind of anti-journalism and positioning a blog as an extension of existing journalism. Andrew Sullivan, for example, makes it very clear that he does not want to be thought of as a journalist. In this sense, his challenge to journalism comes not from competition with journalism on its own grounds, but from his attempt to set up something completely outside journalism. He wants to be believed precisely because he is *not* a journalist. As a counterweight to the idea of journalism, he offers the community of bloggers as a shared identity.

Membership in this community, he implicitly claims, identifies himself as being on equal footing with the audience. He asserts authority by breaking with those who claim a privileged place in the social order. Elsewhere, I (2004) have addressed how the double-break functions in popular psychology, where experts often assert authority through the rejection of other experts. The bloggers here under consideration made much the same move. Of course, this move was made alongside (and sometimes within) Andrew Sullivan's publications in all manner of journals of opinion and newspapers. In this sense, Sullivan plays both ends of the opposition against each other. Joshua Micah Marshall, meanwhile, seems content to establish a blog that blends into journalism. His postings read as extended commentaries on specific stories, as if he is whispering in your ear while you read the newspaper yourself. So, there is some crucial variety in how these bloggers relate to journalism.

It is also worth considering the ideological valences of these blogs. Three of the four blogs (those by Sullivan, Kaus, and Reynolds) maintain a conservative/libertarian point of view. It is probably not a coincidence that authorities with such a uniform ideological standpoint would use the "double-break" approach to authority. Put bluntly, the approach that these bloggers take can be compared with the anti-intellectualism Richard Hofstadter described. Hofstadter remarked that, in anti-intellectualism, intellect is pitted against "democracy, since intellect is felt to be a form of distinction that defies egalitarianism" (p. 46). By addressing a lay audience, and underscoring their own bids to authority with appeals to this kind of populism, Reynolds, Marshall, and Kaus take approaches to authority that can, *prima facie*, be compared with the approaches taken by others in the political spotlight in 2002-2003. In particular, it is worthwhile to consider the similarities between the anti-journalism populism found in these three bloggers' work and the "common sense" arguments for a U.S. war with Iraq in 2002-2003. In both cases, we find a distrust of "so-called" experts, and an effort to conceal the fact of authority, as if the ideas they espouse were spontaneously arising from a collective will.

Consideration of the authority of these bloggers also presents an opportunity for an exploration of Susan Herbst's model for a new kind of authority — what she calls "media-derived authority" (2003). She applies media-derived authority to politicians who derive benefit from media visibility, and the same idea can be applied to the bloggers under consideration here. Herbst notes how media-derived authority can come from: the amount of media coverage an individual receives, the tone of that coverage (especially including coverage acceptance of individual's issue frames), the degree to which the individual is represented as capable of moving public opinion, and the degree to which the individual is portrayed as capable of providing logic and persuasive evidence. Here the bloggers have a certain advantage over the politicians that Herbst examines. Because political bloggers are capable of covering themselves — mentions of themselves and of each other play a prominent role in their commentary — they can address their own authoritative standing in a manner that we rarely see in journalists or politicians. They portray themselves (and often, each other) in a positive light and make themselves and other bloggers out to be powerful movers of public opinion, as well as capable of using logic and evidence. In a sense, they are capable of "bootstrapping" authority out of mentioning themselves, insinuating themselves into political issues. I have not demonstrated any causal connection between the bloggers' authoritative appeals and their prominence in the field of political commentary. What can be seen here, however, is something that sets bloggers aside from journalists: they have been, in a sense, less constrained by professional routine

than their peers in traditional journalism. Their comparatively free-floating status (especially in 2002-2003) allowed them a wide latitude for authoritative positioning.

When the cases of these four blogs are considered in terms of their authoritative appeals, there are some important lessons for blog researchers as well. Much as traditional journalism sustained its own authoritative voice, in part through maintenance of the myth of the unified and stable "story," the new approach to journalism found in blogging sustains its own authority through claims relating to context, multiplicity, heterodoxy, personalization, and charisma. As blogs become a more widely researched domain, we have reason to be wary of taking bloggers at their own words. Here it is worth looking at the work of Axel Bruns, whose influential and imaginative discussion of the topic of blogs finds him describing "news blogs" as "a corrective and a supplement" (Bruns, 2008, p. 69) to other news sources. Bruns's description of these blogs goes further, emphasizing the egalitarianism of blogging, as when he notes that, though "news blogs . . . generally involve their operators in a role of sole gatewatcher, journalist, *and* editor, . . . the operation of linking and commenting across blogs also severely undermine the power of that role" (p. 78). Bruns pits news bloggers against journalists in a familiar new vs. old media contrast, noting that "citizen journalists and news bloggers are substantially more positively predisposed towards engaging in a distributed process of correspondence aimed towards the continuing evaluation of news than are their industrial counterparts" (p. 83). Concludes Bruns: "In this new project of communal journalism produsage rather than industrial production, professional expertise or standing no longer has any special role" (p. 84). This vision of blogging is not at all uncommon and can be found in other scholarly work on blogs.

There is a striking similarity between the vision of blogs that is offered by the bloggers studied here and the vision of blogs that Bruns offers. One reason for their similarity, of course, may be that both are correct. It is inviting to conclude that blogs simply *are* more open, more democratic, more capable of actual journalism, less hierarchical, less authority-based, and less "bad" than traditional journalism.

However, to arrive at this conclusion would involve (paradoxically, for this is a case of "active users") granting to the technology itself the power to create this situation; this would be to assume that there is something *in* blogs that makes them what they are. To avoid this, I return to Lucas Graves' aforementioned suggestion that blogs be approached in terms of their "affordances" (p. 331). Graves defines affordances as "the features of a technology that make a certain action possible" (p. 332). Following this logic, he notes that "a genre embodies what those emerging technological capabilities suggest to a particular society at a given moment, giving the technology meaning and purpose in human affairs" (p. 343). The concept of the affordance gives us a way dialectically to pull together the technological and cultural dimensions of praxis, to appreciate how, "when turning our gaze from object to underlying technology, we can preserve a role for the motive force of what such a technology not only permits but also suggests to the society rendering it" (p. 336). Graves points to "reader input, fixity, and juxtaposition" as meaningful affordances found in blogs (p. 342).

With this in mind, I suggest that blogs, when considered simultaneously in terms of their technology and in terms of the culture surrounding them, have lent themselves to a specific approach to authority. This is the approach to authority I described above, with its reliance on a double-break. To

understand the significance of blogging in terms that are largely consistent with bloggers' own claims is to mistake a fluid, rhetorically constructed, and strategic practice for a feature of the technology itself. Much as important scholarship on journalism succeeded for its willingness to challenge the stories that journalists told about themselves, scholars of blogs would do well to challenge the stories that bloggers tell about themselves.

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