

Using Genre Theory to Understand the Way Opinion Journalism  
is Changing in Today's Digital World

Tess Halpern

## Introduction

I began writing for my college newspaper at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst as an opinion columnist during my freshman year. I had no real writing experience, and I especially had no experience with column writing, but I began composing a biweekly article on topics ranging from politics, to current events, to personal stories, and just about anything else I was interested in. A semester later, I became an assistant editor for Opinion and Editorial and by the time I was a junior, I was running the section. In four years, I have gone from someone with no real interest in opinion journalism to someone who reads it constantly and even educates my peers on the topic.

Unintentionally, I have even pursued educational tracks that center around the writing form. I am graduating with an English major, where the writing style common in the discipline is similar to the writing style in opinion journalism, and I am also pursuing minors in political science and sociology, which are both topics that are typically written about in opinion articles. With this type of journalism relating to all of my educational fields and occupying much of my extracurricular time, this form of writing has — intentionally or not — shaped my college experience, and it is likely to play a large role in my future endeavors.

But while a majority of my work as an editor consists of correcting grammar and fact checking, the hardest facet of my job has nothing to do with those things. During my two years in this position, the part of my job that has consistently plagued me is deciding when articles are unpublishable. At the Collegian, we have bylaws that state that we will not publish opinion articles that are racist, homophobic, sexist, or otherwise inherently offensive, but those vague guidelines are all we have to go off of when making decisions about the articles in front of us.

How does one decide when an article is “inherently offensive?” And more importantly, how does one explain to a writer that their opinion is so offensive that it cannot be published?

Last year, I received an article in which the author was arguing against gender neutral bathrooms. Essentially, the writer argued that gender nonconforming individuals make the choice to be gender nonconforming, and therefore society should not have to change to accommodate those people. That article was not published because it was deemed offensive to gender nonconforming individuals. But last year I also received an article in which a different writer was arguing in favor of Betsy DeVos’ proposed rollback of Obama-era campus sexual assault policies. Essentially, the writer argued that Obama-era Title IX policies prevented those who are accused of sexual assault from their constitutional right to due process. This article was published, though many readers complained that it was offensive to victims of sexual assault.

What separates those two articles? As the person who made the final decision to publish or not in both cases, it’s still very difficult to say. Both articles were controversial, and both went against the beliefs of our largely-liberal audience, but only one was deemed publishable, and it is hard to articulate why even after a year of reflection. So, one can imagine how difficult it was to articulate in the moment. When I told the first writer that their opinion article was not going to be published, they didn’t understand why. Every explanation from me — telling them that their opinion wasn’t based in fact, was offensive, and was not suitable for publication — resulted in the response, “But it’s my opinion.” The writer grew incensed, argued that they were being wrongfully censored, and said that they would get the article published elsewhere.

In today’s politically-contentious society, opinions are abundant. Things like blogs and podcasts are ubiquitous, allowing people to publish their own analyses and opinions without editorial review. Opinions can even be shared via social media with even less consideration;

someone could share a thought with the world in as little as five seconds on Twitter, adding their opinion to the millions upon millions of others on the site. But, while I can say with a certain degree of confidence that these opinions are not opinion journalism, what I can't say with certainty is why they are different. The same question that I wrestle with in my job is one that is now becoming ever more present with the growing prevalence of "published" opinions: What is the distinction between opinion journalism and ordinary opinion?

When calling something "journalism," you are implying a certain degree of credibility. There are accuracy and fact-checking standards that exist in the field, and there are editors who ensure that the published work lives up to those standards. These standards also extend to opinion journalism; any opinion could be published on a blog or on social media, but only a well-researched opinion could be published in a newspaper. However, determining an "well-researched opinion" versus any other opinion is far more difficult than one may think. For example, someone could write an opinion article about climate change arguing that it is not influenced by humans, and that article could cite the one percent of scientific research that supports that claim. Is that a researched article? Is it worthy of publication? On the other hand, someone could write an opinion about higher education using their own personal experience and no other sources. Can an article without outside sources be well-researched? Is that article worthy of publication?

Determining the difference between opinion journalism and ordinary opinion is growing increasingly difficult. But differentiating the two discourses has also become increasingly important as our world becomes more opinion-saturated, as the line between fact and fiction becomes more blurred, and as the term "fake news" takes on a life of its own. Today, out of the

multitude of opinions published everywhere from newspapers to magazines to blogs to social media, how does one decide which texts deserve the marking of “journalism?”

One of the central ways we “decide” upon the norms of writing is through our recognition of it as a genre. Therefore, in order to distinguish opinion journalism from ordinary opinions, I will first analyze genres, since that is the medium through which all discourse is differentiated. I will then determine the genre norms of opinion journalism, analyzing the texts, the writers, and the publications that define the genre. But while these accepted norms may represent an “ideal” form of opinion journalism, where can the proverbial line be drawn, separating even “non-ideal” opinion journalism from ordinary opinion? To answer this question, I will also be analyzing unconventional sources of opinion writing and comparing them to the ideal in order to define the boundary line that distinguishes opinion journalism.

### **Genre Theories**

Genre theory has existed for many years, though not necessarily under that name. In 1969, James Kinneavy wrote an article entitled “The Basic Aims of Discourse” in which he outlines the history of genre theory in order to determine “the aims of discourse” (Kinneavy 297). In classifying discourses by aim, these historical theorists paved the way for genre theory.

Kinneavy begins with Aristotle and Aquinas who, as early as the 300s BCE, distinguished discourses into four categories: scientific use of language that achieved certainty, dialectical use of language that worked in the realm of probability, rhetorical use of language based on seeming probability, and a poetic use of language that incorporated an internal probability (Kinneavy 298). Significantly later, George Miller created a theory in which discourse was informative, opinionated, used to change status, or emotive (Kinneavy 300).

Similarly, Bertrand Russell theorized that all language could be classified as either declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory (Kinneavy 300).

Some theorists, in classifying discursive works as such, included historical context into their analysis. Others focused on aspects such as the medium or the grammatical choices made by the author. But no matter the criteria used, all of these early genre theories focused on determining the aim of discourse and classifying discourse by its aim. But genre theory was forever changed in 1984 when Carolyn Miller published “Genre as a Social Action,” in which Miller argued that genre was not created by the author’s goal, but that the goals of the author are in fact dictated by situational factors.

Miller first analyzes the work of genre theorists before her such as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who characterized genre as something that is “composed of a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic,” (Miller 152). According to Campbell and Jamieson, the dynamic combines substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics, therefore creating a genre that is “a rhetorical ‘response’ to situational ‘demands.’” (Miller 152). Being that genre by this theory is created by a specific situation, Miller uses Lloyd Bitzer’s concept of “exigence,” an external cause of discourse, to enhance this genre theory. Because exigence must be located in the social world, and because writing is a reaction to the exigence, writing is therefore a social act according to Miller (153). However, in critique of Campbell and Jamieson, Miller contends that this theory does not effectively predict or limit genre in any way (Miller 153). While these theorists conceptualized of a way to consider genre, they failed to create a system through which works can be categorized into genres.

Through her analysis of past theories, Miller adopts her own definition, arguing that “members of a genre are discourses that are complete, in the sense that they are circumscribed by

a relatively complete shift in rhetorical situation,” (Miller 159). However, a rhetorical situation must be “recurrent” in order for a body of work to be a genre, although that recurrence does not necessarily include “a material situation (a real, objective, factual event)” (Miller 157). In other words, an exact situation does not need to repeat for the situation to be recurrent; the person experiencing it must simply classify it as recurring based on the type of situation that it is.

Miller also contends that a genre is not to be defined by the substance or the form of the discourse, but instead it is to be defined by “the action [the discourse] is used to accomplish,” (Miller 151). Within each recurrent situation, there exists a “conventionalized social purpose,” otherwise known as an exigence (Miller 162). Since all writing is a response to an exigence, or a social motive, then all writing is therefore a social act. A genre exists when the situation recurs, resulting in a recurring exigence that people respond to in a similar way in order to achieve the same outcome. In sum, Miller argues that genre is a combination of features that creates a particular written impact in a given situation, with form, style, content, tone, etc. being a result of that situation. Miller’s genre theory is simplified and illustrated in Figure 1.

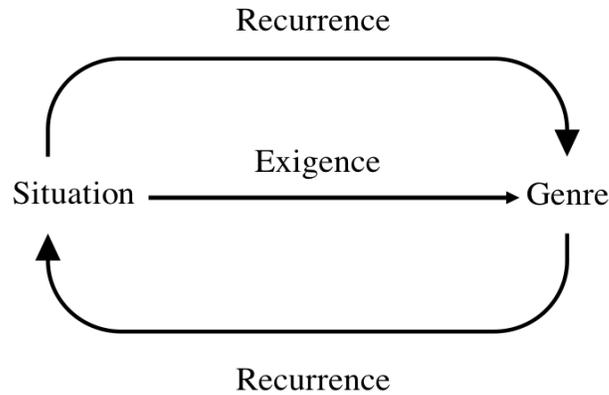
That being said, while Miller offers this fixed definition of what “genre” is, she also works to emphasize the fact that genres are in fact not fixed and there is no set list that could ever possibly contain all genres. She writes that “genres are an open class,” leaving open the potential for genres to be created and also for old genres to disappear. In this way, although Miller defines what a genre is, she also makes it clear that the definition is fluid — it will change over time, as will the classifications that we currently use as “genres.”



*Fig. 1: Miller’s theory states that a recurring situation is the exigence for a genre.*

When coming up with his own definition of “genre” 16 years after Miller, Anis Bawarshi in “The Genre Function” also emphasizes the role that social situation plays. However, in contrast to Miller who claimed that genre results from situation, Bawarshi suggests that situation and genre function in a cycle, one influencing the other infinitely. As Bawarshi says, “genres do not simply help us define and organize kinds of texts; they also help us define and organize kinds of social actions [...] that these texts rhetorically make possible,” (Bawarshi 335). In this way, while Miller suggests that genre is created by the exigence that results from a social situation, Bawarshi suggests that social meaning is in fact created by the genre in response to a situation that has happened before. Bawarshi’s genre theory is simplified and illustrated in Figure 2.

As an example, Bawarshi uses a three-sentence passage that details a room with an incorrect clock, a dead woman on a bed, a silent figure leaving the house, and a crying baby. Bawarshi argues that if someone were told that this passage was from an autobiography, the reader might assume that the baby is the author, the dead woman is its mother, and the story that follows will be about the author’s motherless childhood. However, if someone were told that this passage was from a mystery, the reader would then take on a detective’s role, searching for clues in this scene. Suddenly, the fact that the clock is incorrect is suspicious and the figure leaving the scene is a suspect. The text has not changed, but the genre gives the reader clues about how to interpret it. Bawarshi summarizes, “just as social institutions assign social roles, so genres assign genre roles, both to the characters who participate within them and to the writers and readers who interact with them,” (Bawarshi 347).

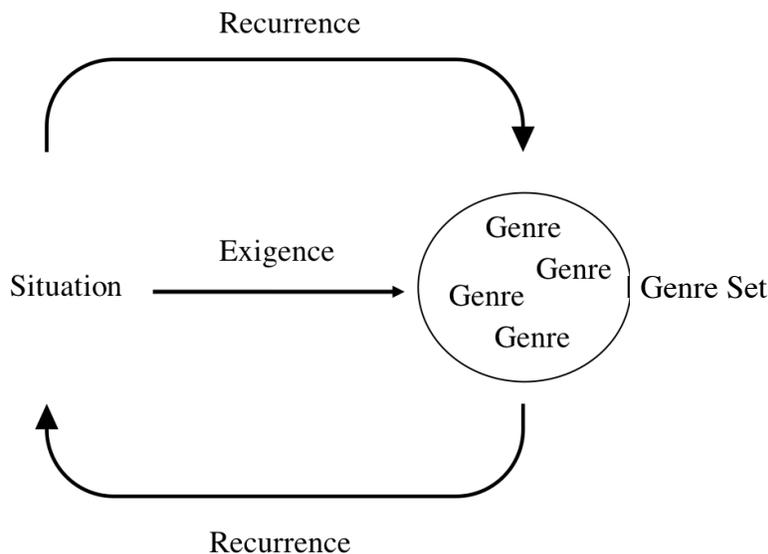


*Fig. 2: Bawarshi's theory states that situation is the exigence for genre, but recurrence of the situation and genre reinforces each other in a cyclical pattern.*

Miller's "cause and effect" theory of genre and situation was expanded by Bawarshi to include more of a cyclical behavior. But in 2004, Amy Devitt in "Writing Genres" expands that theory even further. In critiquing the idea that genre is a direct response to a recurring situation, Devitt first declares that many genres can respond to one situation, and therefore the relationship between genre and situation cannot be as simple as Miller suggests. Instead, Devitt proposes that there is a "reciprocal and dynamic" relationship between genre and situation in which "people construct genre through situation and situation through genre," like Bawarshi suggests (Devitt 21). However, Devitt develops this idea further to include "contexts beyond the more immediate context of situation" such as culture and past genres (Devitt 26). Since culture "influences how situation is constructed and how it is seen as recurring in genres," one cannot analyze genre without considering the culture in which the genre exists (Devitt 25). Furthermore, since our understanding of the past influences our understanding of the present, and since "one never writes or speaks in a void," the knowledge that genres exist also influences how we see genres. Because of this, Devitt considers genres as the nexus of situation, culture, and past genres.

As previously mentioned, Devitt asserts that multiple genres can respond to one situation. Because of this, Devitt emphasizes the role of intertextuality in genres, and she also introduces the concept of “genre sets.” According to Devitt, “the concepts of intertextuality and dialogue allow us to see the inherent relatedness of genres within the same social group and its actions” (Devitt 55). In other words, one cannot look at a genre individually; one must instead consider its context and its related genres in order to see how the genre functions. Devitt’s theory of genre is simplified and illustrated in Figure 3.

Importantly, Devitt also separates her theory from others by emphasizing the fluidity that can exist in genres. While Miller and Bawarshi’s theories allow for fluidity in context, with new genres being created and old genres disappearing, Devitt is the first to suggest that there can be fluidity that exists *within* a genre. In this way, the concept of the genre set is crucial because it allows for difference between texts — even significant difference — so long as the text remains within the boundary of the genre set.



*Fig. 3: Devitt’s theory is much like Bawarshi’s except for the inclusion of the “genre set” which allows for more variation of text.*

## Genre Theories in Practice

While Miller's genre theory was groundbreaking for its time, this linear "cause and effect" theory was proven to be lacking a serious component by later theorists, such as Bawarshi and Devitt. But, while Bawarshi and Devitt both consider the cyclical nature of genre and situation, only Devitt analyzes situation and genre in a holistic view, allowing for variation through what she referred to as the "genre set." Furthermore, only Devitt considers other situational factors, such as culture, and how they may influence genre. This becomes clearer when looking at examples of genre from the perspective of each theorist.

Throughout her analysis, Miller uses a eulogy as an example of a genre. Her straightforward theory of how genre is formed (Figure 1) fits this example because the situation in this case — death — is recurring. Even though each death is unique, we can still recognize death as something that occurs over and over again. Furthermore, death typically results in the more specific situation — a funeral — which acts as an exigence for the writing of a eulogy. People close to the deceased typically eulogize the dead in a way that follows a pattern: there is a somber tone, the deceased is regarded in a positive way, the writing is relatively brief and informal. Finally, the eulogy also fits the final criteria of Miller's theory because it fulfills a social action: to comfort the living by remembering the dead. The writing here is a response to the situation, and the writing follows similar patterns because it is done to complete the same social action.

Bawarshi would look at the same example in a more thorough way due to his cyclical theory (Figure 2). Bawarshi writes that "genres [...] constitute the very exigences to which their users in turn rhetorically respond," meaning genre is constantly confirming the situation, which then recurs to reaffirm the genre, and so on (Bawarshi 355). So, in the case of the eulogy,

Bawarshi would not argue that eulogies follow the same patterns because all eulogizers are responding to the same exigence with the same social goal, as Miller would. Instead, Bawarshi would say that the genre has created a situation in which a eulogy is the only appropriate social response. After all, if someone were asked to eulogize a person who they didn't particularly care for, the eulogy would still follow the same norms as a eulogy from someone who deeply cared for the deceased, even if the exigence and the feeling behind the writing was different. The eulogizer would not speak ill of the dead because the genre of eulogies does not create a situation where that is appropriate. In this way, the genre of the eulogy obviously doesn't result in the situation of death, but it alters the way we view that situation and react to it.

But when looking at this example, Devitt (Figure 3) would step back further than Miller and Bawarshi to analyze all the texts that result from the situation. While the eulogy certainly fits into the genre set that is a result of the situation of death, many other genres would also be included. For example, inside the boundary of the genre set there may be the eulogy in addition to the obituary, the notice of death, the sympathy card, and even the death certificate. Although these texts are different, the exigences for them all come from the same recurring situation, so they must be analyzed together according to Devitt. Additionally, it is also possible for a eulogy to differ from other eulogies, so long as it remains within the genre set. Like Bawarshi, Devitt would argue that once the genre set is established, it creates a situation in which those texts are the only appropriate responses to death. This leads to a cycle of recurrence, where the situation results in the genre set, and the genre set dictates how that situation is dealt with in the future. Finally, Devitt would also acknowledge that the analysis of this genre is incomplete without also analyzing cultural influences on the situation. The situation of death is recurring no matter the culture, but the more specific situation of the funeral is not. As a result, while this genre set

resulting from death may exist in America and other westernized countries, the genre set may be entirely different, or may not exist at all, in other cultures.

By simply looking at the one text that results from the one recurring situation, Bawarshi and Miller's theories can effectively find the genre norms that exist for a specific text — such as the eulogy. But when it comes to analyzing situations and texts as a whole, including the variations that may exist in both, Devitt's theory certainly takes more into account and allows for more difference in text, purpose, and form. This more thorough theory of genre is again exemplified when looking at the opposite situation of death — a birthday. When someone is celebrating a birthday, their friends, family, and acquaintances typically write them a short, sentimental card expressing their appreciation for them in order to make that person feel valued on that day. Because the recurring situation — the birthday — leads to a written response that aims to have a certain social impact, Miller would argue that a birthday card is a genre. Bawarshi would extend that theory to argue that the situation calling for the birthday card is reaffirmed every time one is given or received, which is why a birthday card is thought of more as a norm today than as a reaction to a situation. In this way, Bawarshi would argue that the genre reaffirms its own situation in a cyclical pattern, to the point where the genre is the only appropriate response to the situation.

But once again, Devitt takes the theory a step further, providing a more in-depth analysis. While the birthday card does result from the situation, there are many other genres that do as well, such as a birthday party invitation or even a public post wishing someone a happy birthday on social media. If you have ever felt pressure to send someone a card for their birthday, both Bawarshi and Devitt would tell you that the pressure is a result of the recurrence cycle. But only Devitt would be able to use the same explanation if you were also feeling pressure to write

someone a public “Happy Birthday” message on their Facebook page. The situation of the birthday constantly reaffirms the need for the resulting genre of the birthday card, but also for the entire genre set which includes cards, Facebook posts, party invitations, etc. This genre set also reaffirms the proper reaction to the situation, becoming normalized in society. Additionally, while some birthday cards may be different than others — some are short, some are funny, some are formal, and some are even blank — they can all be considered within the genre set of the birthday card, so long as they retain enough of the necessary features. Finally, Devitt would argue that the birthday itself is not the entire situation, as the situation must also take culture into account. It has become an American norm for birthday cards to be sent to others to acknowledge the day of their birth, but that is not a universal occurrence. The genre of the birthday card is one that is dominated by American culture, encouraged by capitalist motivations of card manufacturers. As a result, the genre set that results from a birthday may be different depending on cultural influences.

The theories of Miller and Bawarshi are effective when it comes to identifying the “ideal” form of a genre — the norms that make the genre what it is. But only Devitt acknowledges that non-ideal forms of a genre can also be included in the genre. After all, eulogies are a result of death, but so are obituaries and death certificates — both of which would be included in the larger genre set that results from the situation. Furthermore, each situation also has a spectrum of acceptable responses, even within the same type of writing. For example, variety exists within the genre set of the eulogy, as some might be more formal or more casual than others, though eulogies can only be formal to a certain point so as not to become obituaries, and they can only be casual to an extent so as to not become an informal remembrance. Likewise, the recurring

situation that results in the “ideal” form of opinion journalism will also result in other types of opinion writing.

In order to understand the genre, one must also take varying forms of writing within the genre set into account. As a result, when studying opinion journalism, the theories of Miller, Bawarshi, and Devitt must all be considered. I will use Miller and Bawarshi’s more straightforward theories to analyze the texts, the writers, and the publications that define opinion journalism in order to determine the norms of the genre. But once the proverbial “center” of the genre is defined, I will then seek to determine what boundary line encompasses all variations of opinion journalism and differentiates the entire genre from everyday opinion. In order to determine that boundary line, I will use Devitt’s theory of genre to analyze more unconventional opinion writing that deviates from the “ideal” but may still be part of the genre set.

Furthermore, as with the examples of the eulogy and birthday card, the concept of culture is crucial to the genre of opinion journalism, though only Devitt considers the role of culture in genre theory. When it comes to the genres of eulogies and birthday cards, culture in a way dictates both the situation and the genre, since the American funeral and the American birthday are both unique to American culture. As a result, eulogies and birthday cards may be drastically different, or even nonexistent, in other cultures. That may be the case for opinion journalism as well, since culture certainly impacts the way you see the world and therefore the opinions that you develop. Additionally, opinion journalism may be regulated under certain governments, resulting in a culture where not all opinions are valid or welcome. But while culture may impact the formation of opinion or the publication of opinion, a more interesting question develops when considering how culture may be changing opinion journalism in this current time. As previously mentioned, this political moment is particularly divisive, resulting in more

partisanship in all facets of politics, including the news coverage and analysis of government. Furthermore, our newly digital world with blogs and social media has resulted in an influx of opinion, blurring the line of opinion journalism. Therefore, although Devitt's inclusion of culture in her analysis of genre may not be crucial when it comes to understanding the history of opinion journalism as a whole, it is certainly crucial to understanding opinion journalism in this particular moment as it begins to redefine itself.

### **Research Questions**

The world of opinion writing is changing, resulting in an environment where determining legitimate opinion writing from ordinary opinion is increasingly difficult. As a result, my research will strive to determine which opinion writings deserve the legitimizing title of "opinion journalism."

The question that I will be seeking to answer through this research is three-fold:

1. What are the accepted genre norms that exist in opinion journalism?
2. Which of the previously-determined genre norms must be followed in order for a text to be included within the larger genre set of opinion journalism?
3. What distinguishes opinion journalism from ordinary opinion?

Ultimately, after answering these questions I will be able to consider the larger, more fundamental question of how opinion journalism is changing in today's cultural moment.

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, I will need to first answer a series of sub-questions.

Miller and Bawarshi have developed theories of genre that define genre norms. Miller's theory suggests that a genre results from a recurring situation, and the genre develops patterns of form, tone, and style because it seeks to fulfill a certain social action. Bawarshi's theory additionally states that genre and situation function together in a cycle, each reinforcing the other every time they recur. In analyzing opinion journalism through these lenses, I ask the following sub-questions:

1. What is the recurring situation that results in opinion journalism?
2. What is the social action that opinion journalism seeks to accomplish?
3. What are the patterns of form, tone, and style that exist in opinion journalism?
4. How does opinion journalism reinforce its situation?

Answering these sub-questions will allow me to answer my first research question.

To answer these questions, I will first assume that opinion journalism is in fact a genre. I will also assume that opinion writing that is published in reputable newspapers is opinion journalism. I will read opinion journalism published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, as these are all considered reputable sources and two publications are left-leaning and one is right-leaning. I will additionally read pieces from a diverse sample of columnists, in terms of gender, race, and political affiliation in order to reduce bias. By analyzing opinion journalism from the publications and writers that define the genre, I will be able to understand what situations, social goals, and stylistic patterns classify the "ideal" form of opinion journalism.

When answering these sub-questions, I will read opinion columns that were all written about the same three events: the firing of FBI Director James Comey, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school shooting, and the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the Supreme

Court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh in relation to the sexual assault allegations made against him. Three articles about each topic from each publication will be analyzed, totaling 27 articles. Controlling for the immediate situation will allow me to better analyze the similarities and differences in the writing itself, since all of the writing will be on the same topic. Additionally, analyzing these more specific situations will allow me to better determine the larger recurring situation that results in opinion journalism. However, while the immediate situation will be controlled for in these writings, the exigences for each individual piece of writing may differ — although they are all focused on the same event, they may be responding to the situation differently and addressing different aspects of the situation. Therefore, while situation will be controlled for, the pieces will still differ as the exigences differ.

After answering these sub-questions and determining the genre norms that define the “ideal” form of opinion journalism, I will then move on to Devitt’s theory of genre. This theory states that there are many different genres that exist together in one larger genre set, and there is a spectrum of appropriate written responses to any given situation. In this way, if opinion journalism is the genre set, the “ideal” as defined by Miller and Bawarshi would be just one point on that spectrum. Therefore, similar forms of writing would also need to be considered and potentially categorized under the umbrella term “opinion journalism.” Furthermore, Devitt considers the role that culture plays in genre in her theory, which is relevant in the analysis of how opinion journalism is adapting to this cultural moment. In analyzing opinion journalism through this lens, I ask the following sub-questions:

1. What are the shared characteristics of “ideal” opinion writing and unconventional opinion writing?

2. How do more modern forms of opinion writing differ from the established “ideal?”

Answering these sub-questions will allow me to answer my second and third research questions.

To answer these questions, I will analyze opinion writing that is incrementally distanced from the reputable news sources analyzed in the initial phase. First, articles will be chosen from the Huffington Post, an online news organization that is considered reputable, though it is not held to the same esteem as the three genre-defining newspapers. Articles will then be selected from BuzzFeed, a website that produces news, though it is not considered a reputable source by most standards. Next will be Odyssey Online, a forum for opinion articles and light news pieces, where articles go through an editing process but there is little regulation on content. Finally, articles will be selected from personal blogs posted on blogspot.com where there is no formal editing process and there is no content regulation.

Once again, I will attempt to include writing from a diverse sample in terms of gender, race, and political affiliation, and I will additionally focus on the same three events as before in order to control for situation. However, this will not be possible when it comes to BuzzFeed, as that organization’s opinion section launched after the firing of Comey and after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting. Therefore, three BuzzFeed articles on gun violence in general, not necessarily related to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, will be chosen, and an additional three articles on the Kavanaugh hearing will be selected in the place of articles on Comey. Three articles on each topic will be selected from each source, totaling of 36 articles.

By comparing these more unconventional forms of opinion writing to the established “ideal,” I will be able to define the genre set more broadly, and I will be able to more accurately distinguish opinion journalism from ordinary opinion. Furthermore, while opinion writing in

reputable news sources has been around for decades, these other forms are more modern and have only existed for the last ten years or so. Therefore, analyzing these newer forms of opinion writing will allow me to better understand the genre as it exists today.

### **Limitations**

Through this analysis, I will be defining the genre norm by analyzing situational factors and the way each writer responds to that situation. As a result, I will not be analyzing other factors that may impact genre, such as the nature of the platform that a piece of writing is being published on, the role data analytics could play in shaping content published on digital-only platforms, and the extent to which editors impact the writing. In this way, my research is focusing more on how the genre of opinion journalism is defined, rather than trying to determine why the genre is defined in that way. This is a limitation of my research, but I would recommend that further research is done in order to answer these questions.

### **Genre Norms of Opinion Journalism**

When choosing what aspects of opinion journalism to focus on in my analysis of the various articles, I first relied on my experience as an editor. In my work, there are certain things that I consider every time I read an article: Does it have sources? Where are those sources from? What is the argument, and how is the writer presenting that argument? Where on the political spectrum does this article fall? Is the writer using personal experience to support their claims, or are they relying on other experts? I additionally wanted to analyze a series of features that allowed me to focus on different aspects of rhetoric, such as style, structure, evidence, purpose, and tone. With that in mind, I conducted my analysis of the norm-defining articles as follows:

## **Norms of Opinion**

When conducting my research, I took note of the political slant of each article, in addition to the opinion that was being expressed. Political slant was considered on a five-point scale including left, center-left, moderate, center-right, and right. Articles that I considered to be “left” and “right” were those that argued common opinions expressed by liberal and conservative politicians, with little to no variation. Center-left and center-right articles contained some variation from the common partisan tropes, and moderate articles made a political argument, but did not take a partisan side. Looking at the opinion of each article, in addition to where the opinion fell on the political spectrum, allowed me to determine what was considered an appropriate response to the given situation. Does an article need to stay within the mainstream political spectrum to be considered appropriate? Does the genre norm allow for more variation of political thought, or are writers seemingly limited to certain responses?

When looking at political slant, I found that the articles were split rather evenly, even though two publications were left-leaning and only one was right-leaning. Out of the 27 articles, I classified eight as left, three as center-left, seven as moderate, four as center-right, and five as right. Articles that I classified as “left” included opinions advocating for strict gun control, opinions supporting Christine Blasey Ford or criticizing Kavanaugh, and opinions that Trump is not fit to lead, as these are opinions expressed by well-regarded Democratic politicians. Conversely, articles that I classified as “right” included the opinion that more guns will solve America’s mass shooting crisis, opinions in favor of Kavanaugh, and opinions against Comey or Hillary Clinton, as Republican politicians typically argue the same opinions.

Center-left and center-right articles contained more ideological variation than expressed above. For example, one article I classified as “center-left” argued that the timing of Comey’s

firing was suspicious, given the fact that Trump was under FBI investigation at the time. This article was critiquing Trump's decision, therefore taking a liberal stance, but it was more a critique on the optics of the decision rather than the legality, separating this opinion from most liberal dialogue on the issue since the more "left" argument would be that this firing was an obstruction of justice. On the other hand, an article I classified as "center-right" argued that the government needs to focus more on mental health to combat the mass shooting crisis. While this article critiqued the likelihood of gun reform — therefore taking a conservative stance on the issue — the article focused on a solution that does not relate directly to guns. As a result, the writer distanced himself from common political arguments.

Finally, moderate articles were ones that expressed political opinions, but did not take a partisan side. Examples of these articles included one that criticized the behavior of all politicians and one that argued that we need to put partisan differences aside to get policy relating to gun reform passed. In total, I classified 11 articles as left-leaning and nine as right-leaning, with seven articles expressing an opinion that was non-partisan. Additionally, just over half of the articles (14 of 27) were not classified as stringently partisan, showing that a nuanced take on partisan issues is a genre norm.

### **Norms of Rhetorical Purpose**

After reading the articles that defined the genre norm, I determined that the rhetorical purpose of all opinion articles was to make an argument — specifically a political one, even if the article was classified as moderate, or non-partisan. Since all articles were argument-focused, I considered the argument styles of the articles in order to study just how the writers were making those arguments and attempting to connect with their readers. I analyzed each article to

determine if the author was appealing to ethos (writer's credibility and ethics), pathos (audience emotion), or logos (facts and logic). I also further broke down the category of logos into two categories — articles that used deductive reasoning and those that used inductive reasoning. A deductive argument was one that presented a conclusion and then proceeded to defend that conclusion throughout the article. An inductive argument, or a bottom-up argument, presented evidence before coming to a conclusion based on that evidence. While analyzing the opinion in each article gave me an opportunity to consider which responses to the situation are appropriate in this genre, an analysis of the way that argument was presented gave me an opportunity to consider that appropriate response more deeply. Are logical arguments more highly regarded than emotional ones? Do those logical arguments need to be formatted in a uniform way, or are inductive and deductive arguments both accepted? Does a writer need to make an ethical appeal, or is the institution they are writing for an ethical appeal on its own?

There was a clear norm when it came to the argument styles used by writers, with all but two articles containing, at least partially, a logical or “logos” argument. Of those 25 articles, 13 relied on inductive reasoning and 12 on deductive reasoning. Inductive arguments presented a conclusion that was likely to be true given the evidence that was presented prior to the conclusion. For example, David Ignatius argued in *The Washington Post* that presidents before Trump have abused their power and like them, Trump will not get away with it. As Ignatius explained the roles that checks and balances have played in previous power-grab attempts made by presidents, one can assume that checks and balances will play the same role today if Trump were to attempt to abuse his power, as Ignatius argued. Deductive arguments included those presented a conclusion before defending that conclusion with evidence. This was seen in “The Latest Schoolhouse Slaughter Shows We Have Been Defeated” by Elizabeth Bruenig. Here,

Bruenig argues that no gun reform will ever pass, as the United States has grown numb to the shock of mass shooting. This conclusion is stated immediately, even suggested in the headline, and the supporting evidence is presented later.

In total, 12 articles additionally contained aspects of emotional or “pathos” arguments. One example, also written by Elizabeth Bruenig for *The Washington Post*, argued that the Kavanaugh hearing was bringing all adult Americans back into the terrors of high school, playing into the immaturity that is seen in the current political sphere. The emotional appeal in this piece was scattered throughout the article, as Bruenig brought her reader back into high school with descriptive language, saying the smell of the hallways was of “soft dissolving sandwich bread, of sneakers and industrial bleach,” and saying that high school, “amid puberty, powerlessness and the wanting uncertainty of what comes next in life amounted to an experience not unlike what cattle go through at livestock shows, right down to the weird glamour.” With this wording, Bruenig is bringing the reader back into high school and forcing them to relive an awkward, uncomfortable time, in order to lead the reader to the conclusion that this current political period is just as awkward and uncomfortable. By appealing to the reader’s nostalgia, Bruenig is appealing to the reader’s emotions. Other pathos appeals were seen most frequently in articles relating to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, as many writers chose to reference the victims in an effort to garner support for their anti-gun positions. In total, only three of nine articles surrounding the Comey firing and two of nine about the Kavanaugh hearing contained an emotional appeal, but seven articles of nine articles about the mass shooting were found to use pathos arguments. This suggests that certain situations may call for a more emotional response than others.

The least-used appeal throughout the genre norm was “ethos,” as only five out of 27 articles used this type of argument. Of those five articles, the clearest example of the ethos appeal was in “Comey’s firing isn’t like the ‘Saturday Night Massacre.’ It’s pretty straightforward.” by Hugh Hewitt. This article begins with the sentence, “Long ago and far away, when I was a young special assistant first to Attorney General William French Smith and then to Attorney General Edwin Meese, the young staff would automatically stand up whenever William Webster, then head of the FBI, walked into a room.” Hewitt then continues to describe his government experience, and he also describes conversations he has had with people who still work in the government as evidence for his argument. In this way, the writer is relying heavily on his own credibility as a well-connected government worker in order to advance his argument. Other examples of ethos arguments were found in “Appeasing the Trigger Gods” by Maureen Dowd as she states in her article that she has been covering the issue of gun control since 1989, and “Men, Step Up in Today’s Sexual Upheaval” by William Galston as he uses his age and gender as a basis for the argument that many men have historically been unaware of the pervasiveness of sexual assault against women.

Because such a vast majority of the articles used an appeal to logic, it is clear that, no matter how that logical argument is structured, a logos appeal is the genre norm. As suggested previously, an ethos appeal is likely not popular within the genre norm because the status of the publication acts as an ethos appeal on its own. Furthermore, while an emotional appeal is acceptable within the genre, it can’t necessarily be classified as a norm as it wasn’t used as frequently as logos. However, certain situations, such as the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, lend themselves to a more emotional response, resulting in an increase in the use of pathos in those articles.

## Norms of Evidence

When analyzing the evidence used in each article, I took note of both external sources, such as linked news articles and government files, and internal sources, such as conversations with friends or personal experience. Additionally, I considered the use of “assumed knowledge” — instances where facts were presented without a clear source or information about where that fact was derived from. Looking at the evidence presented in each article allowed me to consider how much factual support an opinion needs to be considered a piece of opinion journalism. Do all articles need sources to be part of the genre norm? What sources are considered reputable at this level? Does personal experience function as evidence, or are other corroborations necessary?

Of the 27 articles, only three were without external sources; the other 24 articles all contained at least one hyperlinked source to support a claim or to provide evidence, suggesting that outside sources are a genre norm. The number of external sources in the 27 articles ranged from zero to 12, with one outlier containing 26 sources. Removing the outlier, there was an average of 5.3 external sources per article. Only four articles additionally used evidence from internal sources, referencing personal experience or conversations. Within those articles, there were nine references to personal experience and seven references to personal conversations.

Outside, hyperlinked sources were largely from the three publications being analyzed (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*), with the writers most often citing the publication that they were being published in. In other words, an article published in *The Washington Post* was most likely to cite other articles from *The Washington Post*. Other linked organizations included Twitter, Politifact, *Vanity Fair*, the FBI, NBC, BBC, Politico, Huffington Post, fivethirtyeight, YouTube, and more. The articles generally limited outside sourcing to other news organizations, whether they were cable, online, or print. Linking

to Twitter, YouTube, or government organizations was only done when direct quotes were being taken from those platforms.

Twenty-five of the 27 articles also included instances of assumed knowledge — a fact or statistic was stated with no source to provide evidence — suggesting that this is also a genre norm. In those 25 articles, there was an average of 5.4 instances of assumed knowledge per article, ranging from one instance to 12.

What was considered to be assumed knowledge varied by article. Some articles included direct quotes from figures without including information about where that quote came from or to whom the quote was said. For example, Maureen Dowd in “Appeasing the Trigger Gods” wrote that President Trump said it would have been “a beautiful, beautiful sight” if more people in Pulse nightclub in Orlando had been armed during the shooting in June 2016 to go “boom” at the “maniac” shooting them. However, she doesn’t provide any other context for that quote, nor does she provide a source. She later quotes N.R.A. chief Wayne LaPierre’s response to Trump’s statement in her *New York Times* article, again without providing a source. Additionally, some articles had statistic-like facts without sources, such as when David Leonhardt wrote that, in the 1960s, the death rate of American children was slightly lower than rates in other affluent nations. This fact, written in Leonhardt’s *New York Times* article “The Truth About the Florida School Shooting,” did not have a source to support it. More articles simply contained examples of well-known information that was stated without a source or further explanation. This was shown in Daniel Henninger’s *Wall Street Journal* article “The James Comey Show,” where the writer brought up “the news in March 2015 that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton created a private email server in 2009” without giving any more background information or providing a source to prove that this happened. However, this is such a well-discussed story that editors likely believed

it to be common knowledge, therefore making a source unnecessary. A majority of instances of assumed knowledge fell into this latter category, although unsourced quotes and statistics also existed.

### **Norms of the Inclusion of Self**

Finally, when analyzing these articles, I took note of the number of personal pronouns used by the writers, under the assumption that this would likely correlate with a use of personal experience as evidence. While this allowed me to analyze a formulaic and stylistic norm within the genre, it also gave me an opportunity to look into deeper questions about the writer's place in a piece of opinion journalism: Within the genre norm, are the writers expected to distance themselves from the content matter? How personal should the content of a piece of opinion journalism be?

In total, the author referred to themselves an average of 7.2 times in each article, with only two articles containing no personal pronouns at all. The number of these pronouns ranged from zero to 49. When only looking at articles that used personal experience as evidence, the average number of personal pronouns increased to 17.5 per article. However, only four articles used personal experience as evidence, so this sample size was quite low. That being said, it appears that the use of personal pronouns is a genre norm, though it is used sparingly except in instances where personal experience is being used as evidence.

Personal pronouns were used for a variety of reasons, the first and most obvious being to declare an opinion. This was shown in "Trump Is Insulting Our Intelligence" by Charles Blow when he states near the end of his piece, "I don't trust anything...coming out of this White House, and I don't trust this feckless Congress to constrain Trump." Here, the personal pronouns

are used exclusively to state the opinion of the writer in a clear way. However, this type of declaration wasn't used that frequently, as writers more often stated their opinions as fact.

Plural pronouns were also used by writers in an effort to make a connection with the reader. An example of this pronoun use can be found in "Respect First, Then Gun Control," as writer David Brooks tries to personally resonate with his reader when he says, "We greet tragedies like the school shooting in Florida with shock, sadness, mourning and grief that turns into indignation and rage." By using the personal pronoun "we," Brooks is not only connecting the reader to the story by literally drawing them into it, but he is also making himself an equal participant — the writer and the reader are in it together.

Finally, personal pronouns were additionally used to establish ethos when a writer was using personal experience as evidence for their argument. This is seen in the Hewitt article discussed previously, as he begins the article by writing, "Long ago and far away, when I was a young special assistant first to Attorney General William French Smith and then to Attorney General Edwin Meese, the young staff would automatically stand up whenever William Webster, then head of the FBI, walked into a room." Here, the personal pronoun is used to declare Hewitt's credibility as a government worker, therefore supporting his ethos appeal.

### **Genre Norms**

Based on this analysis, I determined that the genre norms for opinion journalism could be synthesized as follows:

1. Articles should contain at least one hyperlinked external source, preferably from reputable news sources.

2. “Internal” sources in the form of personal experiences or personal conversations are accepted, but less so than external sources.
3. Assumed knowledge should be limited in quantity, and instances of assumed knowledge should also be limited to well-known news stories. Statistics and quotes should generally be supported by external sources.
4. Opinions should be located on the political spectrum, though they shouldn’t necessarily be strictly partisan. More nuanced partisan opinions, as well as moderate opinions, are preferred.
5. Opinion articles should not be limited to one political ideology but should instead vary across the entire political spectrum.
6. Logos arguments are preferred over other appeals, and inductive and deductive reasoning are equally valid.
7. Pathos and ethos arguments are used sparingly, and pathos arguments are more acceptable as responses to certain situations than to others.
8. Writers rarely use personal pronouns, unless they are using personal experience as evidence.

In sum, these norms suggest that an appropriate response to a situation calling for opinion journalism must be measured, nuanced, political, and supported by facts. Additionally, an appropriate opinion should be located on the mainstream political spectrum, though most responses differed from average partisan tropes. Finally, all opinions must be based in facts, typically from reputable external sources, though personal experience can also be used sparingly as evidence.

## **Expanding the Genre Set**

When moving to the second stage of my data analysis, I once again focused on the same four categories — the opinion, the rhetorical purpose, the evidence, and the role of the writer — allowing me to directly compare these writings with the genre norm. I additionally took note of ways in which these articles differed from the norm in terms of content and style, looking at aspects such as word choice, formatting, the adherence to AP style, and the use of deeply personal material.

### **Expanding Opinion**

Once again, I took note of both the political slant and the opinion expressed in each article. I considered political slant on the same five-point scale that I used previously, and I made the distinctions between left, center-left, moderate, center-right, and right based on the same criteria. Once again, articles that I classified as left and right were those that expressed opinions that are commonly held by Democratic and Republican politicians. Center-left and center-right articles expressed partisan opinions but included some deviation from the commonplace arguments. Moderate articles expressed political opinions but remained non-partisan. Analyzing these factors and comparing them to the previous findings allowed me to determine if these articles were expanding the notion of what an appropriate response to the given situation is.

Of the 36 total articles, I classified 15 as left, 10 as center-left, six as moderate, two as center-right, and one as right. This means that 25 of 36 articles (69.4 percent) were left-leaning and only three of 36 (8.3 percent) were right-leaning. This was a sharp contrast from the genre norm where the 27 articles were more evenly split, with 11 classified as left-leaning and nine as right-leaning. However, only 16 articles of the 36 in the second phase of research were on the far

ends of the political spectrum, with 18 articles expressing more nuanced partisan opinions or moderate opinions. This was consistent with the genre norm, where just over half of the articles were somewhere in the middle of the political spectrum.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the only right-leaning articles were found on Odyssey Online and blogs. I classified the nine Huffington Post articles as three left-leaning, five center-left, and one moderate, and I classified the BuzzFeed articles as six left-leaning, two center-left, and one moderate. Conversely, I classified the Odyssey Online articles as four left-leaning, three moderate, and one center-right. The blogs were the most politically diverse, classified as two left-leaning, three center-left, one moderate, one center-right, and one right-leaning. While this heavy representation of political views to the left of the political spectrum may be a result of the political leaning of the news organizations that I selected samples from, the opinion articles from the reputable news organizations from the first analysis were generally more politically diverse, despite the fact that the news organizations had clear political leanings themselves. This suggests that, while ideological diversity is a genre norm, it may not exist throughout the genre set.

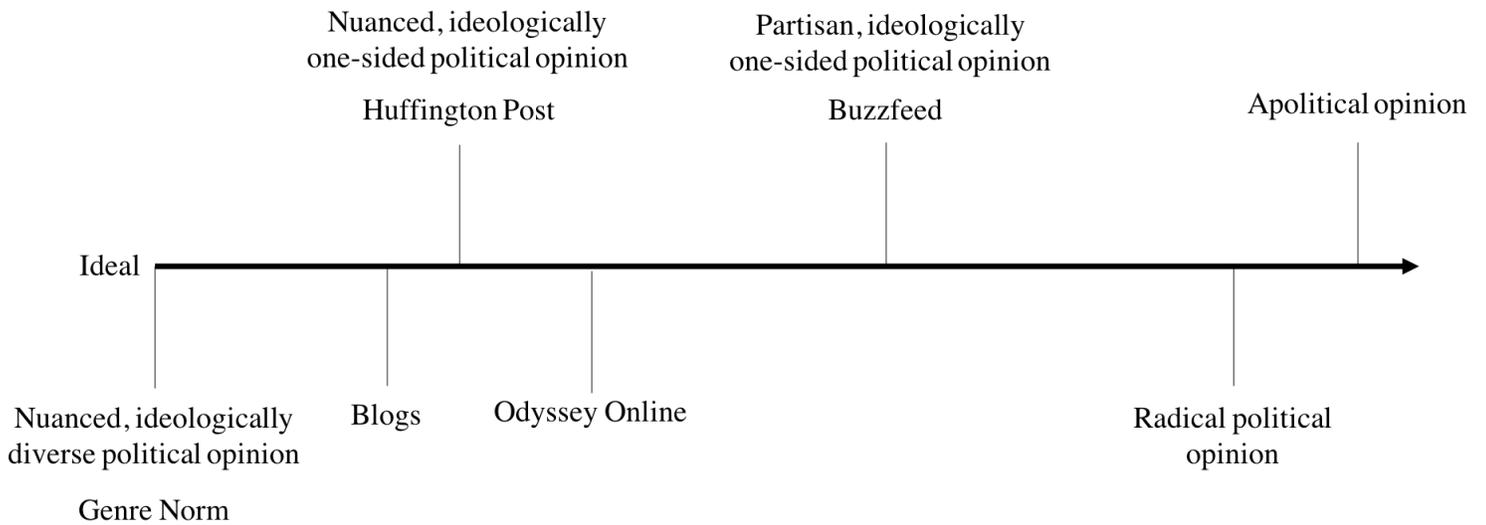
Furthermore, while I was generally able to classify articles on the same political spectrum as before when conducting the second phase of research, some opinions were more radical than the ones expressed in the genre norm. For example, while articles I classified as “left” once again expressed opinions arguing against Trump or Kavanaugh, articles arguing in favor of Blasey Ford, or articles in favor of gun control, other leftist arguments included one advocating for Democratic court packing, and one stating that if the constitution is not amended to limit the term of Supreme Court justices, civil war could break out. While these are leftist arguments, as they are critical of the right-leaning Supreme Court, they are too radical to be arguments expressed by mainstream politicians, pushing these arguments past the political spectrum. The

only article classified as “right” was likewise radical beyond the mainstream political spectrum, arguing that Democrats are tyrants who favor dictatorship. Of the 34 articles that were classified politically, only these three articles were too fringe to be considered mainstream.

Center-left articles included one that argued that the Parkland survivors are effective advocates, and one that argued that the NRA started out innocently but has since become a nefarious organization. While these are leftist arguments surrounding the issue of guns, neither article is directly advocating for gun control, separating them from the average partisan trope. Likewise, center-right articles included one that said better security guard training at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school could have prevented the shooting, and one that said Kavanaugh should be confirmed, though he should be removed from office if he is later found to be guilty of sexual assault. The article surrounding the shooting offered a solution that does not limit guns, therefore taking a right-leaning position, but a more traditional Republican argument would be that more armed guards is the solution to gun violence, not simply better trained guards. The other article supported Kavanaugh, therefore also taking a right-leaning position, but the writer doesn't ignore or diminish the accusations made against him. In this way, both articles are distanced from classic partisan arguments. Moderate articles did not take a partisan position though they still made political arguments, such as an article that said both parties are putting up bad policy relating to gun control, and an article that looked into the logistics of impeachment, ultimately arguing that it will be difficult to prove obstruction of justice.

Although I classified most articles politically, even if they were radical beyond the mainstream spectrum, two articles of the 36 — one from Odyssey Online and one from a blog — were not political at all. The first, published on Odyssey Online, was a religious response to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting. Republicans are more prone to call for prayers after tragic

events such as mass shootings, suggesting that I could have classified this article on the right side of the political spectrum. However, this writer quoted scripture and made direct pleas to God and Jesus, making the argument more religious than political. The other article, published on a personal blog, was also a response to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting. This writer argued that the shooting was another Valentine’s Day massacre, and also claimed that it was suspicious that the shooting took place in Parkland, Florida because President John F. Kennedy was pronounced dead in Parkland Memorial Hospital. This writer additionally stated that mass shootings may be divine retribution for high abortion rates. While I would generally classify anti-abortion opinions on the right side of the political spectrum, this writer’s opinion was more of a conspiracy theory, making it apolitical. Figure 4 shows the variation that exists in terms of opinion within the genre set of opinion journalism.



*Fig. 4: As an opinion moves farther from the ideal, it nears the edge of the genre set.*

## **Expanding Rhetorical Purpose**

I previously determined that the rhetorical purpose of all opinion journalism is to make an argument. Therefore, I once again analyzed the argument style of each article through the classification of either ethos, pathos, or logos, distinguishing logos as either a deductive or an inductive argument. Repeating this process allowed me to determine if the logical norm set by the reputable sources continued throughout the genre set.

A majority of the articles studied in the second phase of research employed a logical argument, continuing the trend seen in the initial phase. Whereas 25 of the original 27 articles contained at least some aspect of a logos argument, 30 of the 36 later articles also contained logos reasoning. The use of logical arguments was spread rather evenly across platforms, with eight Huffington Post articles, eight BuzzFeed articles, six Odyssey Online articles, and eight blogs containing a logos argument. These logical arguments were structured quite similarly to the previous articles, relying on evidence — either external or internal — to support their claims. As a result, it is clear that the genre norm of a logos appeal is consistent throughout the genre set.

However, whereas the articles defining the genre norm used deductive and inductive arguments equally, with 13 relying on inductive reasoning and 12 on deductive, 25 of the 30 logical arguments from the second stage of research used deductive reasoning, totally 83.3 percent. Only five of the 30 articles, or 16.6 percent, used inductive reasoning. Furthermore, three of those five inductive arguments were found in Huffington Post articles, none were found in BuzzFeed, and Odyssey Online and personal blogs each had only one.

While an even representation of deductive and inductive reasoning was a genre norm, that norm was not consistent throughout the genre set. That is potentially because inductive reasoning, as it moves from factual evidence to a conclusion, could be seen as a more difficult

argument to present. Whereas deductive reasoning states a conclusion at the beginning, inductive reasoning works to lead the reader to the writer's conclusion throughout the piece, therefore leaving more opportunities for the reader to come to a different conclusion than the writer. This could mean that deductive arguments might be preferred by writers when they are presenting arguments that are up for more interpretation, because the writer is not giving the reader time to make their own assumption. Additionally, deductive arguments may be needed when supporting evidence isn't as strong, as leading with weak evidence could make someone doubt the conclusion that follows. As a result, it could be argued that an inductive argument is more demanding for the writer, but likely more engaging for the reader.

It is also possible that the increase in deductive arguments found on the digital-only platforms is due to data analytics. On digital platforms, it is increasingly important to keep your reader engaged and on the page for as long as possible in order to make more revenue from advertisements. Inductive arguments may encourage readers to click off the page if they can't get to the opinion before their attention has diminished. Therefore, deductive arguments may be used more because they may pique the reader's interest enough to convince the reader to continue to the end of the article. Regardless of the reason, more variety in argument type, and more nuanced arguments such as the inductive arguments of the first stage of research, is a genre ideal that was not necessarily met in later articles.

Pathos was once again the second-most-used argument type, with 13 of 36 articles containing an emotional appeal — three Huffington Post articles, four BuzzFeed articles, four Odyssey Online articles, and two blogs. Once again, an emotional response was more appropriate for certain situations, with none of the nine articles about Comey's firing displaying emotional appeals, but six of 12 articles about the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting and eight

of 15 articles about the Kavanaugh hearing using pathos arguments. Generally, these articles appealed to emotion in a way that echoed the pathos arguments of before, though some articles were more emotionally-driven than previous articles. For example, two articles contained curse words and one contained very graphic imagery, showing moments where the author may be taking an emotional appeal too far. Likewise, three articles directly advocated for violence, with one advocating for violence against democrats, one advocating for the public hanging of mass shooters, and one suggesting that Kavanaugh be thrown “into the eternal pit” if he is found guilty of sexual assault. Through cursing, including gore, and encouraging violence, these authors were showing a degree of anger that was not present in the genre norm, even when writers were employing an emotional appeal. Additionally, four articles were determined to be otherwise extremely personal and emotional, as they repeatedly referred to victims of gun violence as “beautiful souls,” discussed personal experiences with sexual assault and mental health issues in a very involved and detailed way, or even outwardly expressed their “fury.” While no opinion article is objective, the writers in the genre norm retained a degree of professional, measured distance from their subject matter, even when using personal experience as evidence or using an appeal to the emotions of the reader. These articles broke that norm, expressing levels of personal emotion that were not seen in previous opinion pieces.

Interestingly, only 10 of the 36 articles used an ethos argument, three from the Huffington Post, five from BuzzFeed, one from Odyssey Online, and one blog. When only five articles of the genre norm contained an appeal to ethos, it was assumed that the status of the publication acted as an ethos appeal on its own, rendering additional ethos arguments unnecessary. If that were the case, one would think that writers for less-distinguished publications would make an ethos appeal in an effort to prove their legitimacy. However, with

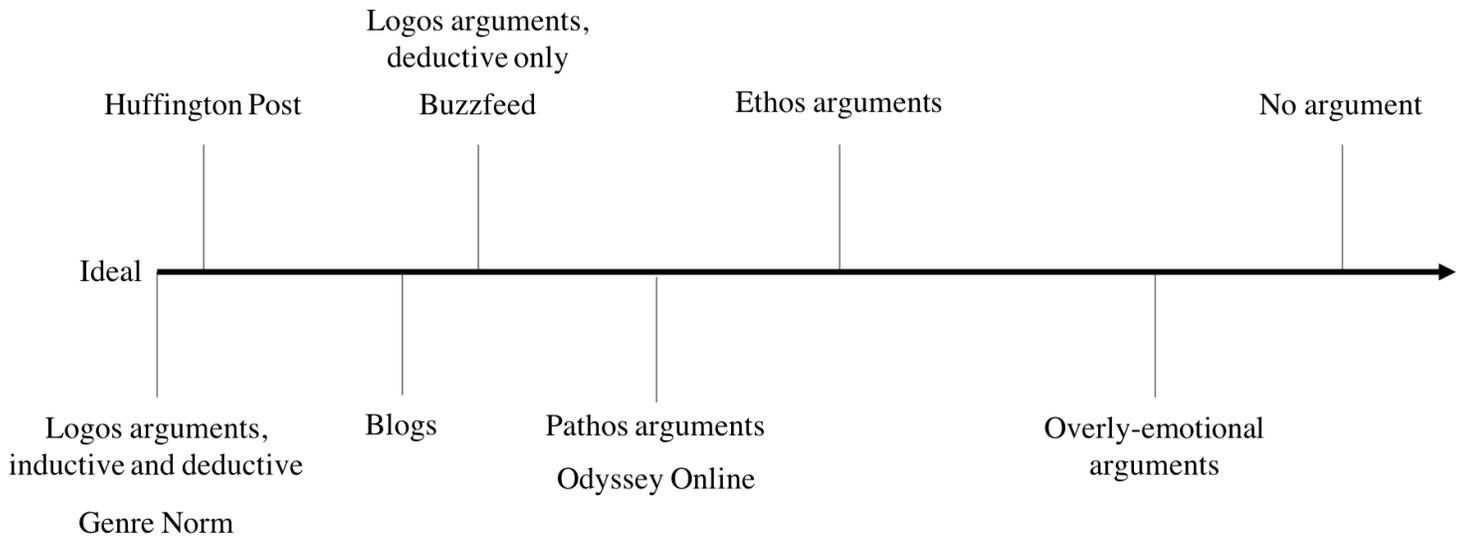
the small representation of the ethos appeal in the second phase of research, it can be determined that the lack of an ethos appeal is a genre norm that remains throughout the genre set.

The writers using ethos arguments relied on personal credibility in the same way that writers did in the genre norm, using personal experience or job titles to display know-how. But writers in the second phase of research were also found to inadvertently discredit themselves in a way that writers of the genre norm did not, as 16 articles contained stylistic deviations from the genre norm. This included six articles that didn't adhere to AP style, six articles with grammatical mistakes or typos, six articles that used bolding, italics, capitalization, or ellipses for emphasis, and six articles that put asides in parentheses. Two articles additionally had citation issues, one including a link that was broken as a source, and one accidentally citing a Google search for the quote they were referencing. There were additionally two formatting differences from the norm, with one article containing a bulleted list and one article written entirely in poem format. Finally, one article contained more colloquial language than was found in the genre norm, using phrases such as "hmm..." and "seems a little bit fishy," and also asking many rhetorical questions. Eight articles in the second phase of research additionally included moments where the writer questioned the ethos of a different person through name calling. In these cases, words like "idiot" and "moron" were used to describe individuals in an attempt to discredit them.

The stylistic deviations could potentially make one question the ethos or reliability of the writer or the publication, as they could be representative of a writer who is not educated in the genre of opinion journalism. However, these deviations are in all likelihood due to differences in writing style and a more relaxed editing process, and they are therefore not a suitable metric to discredit the writer entirely. However, while stylistic deviations can be explained away by

looking at different editing processes, the ad hominem, name-calling attacks were differences from the norm in terms of content, relating more to the over-emotion seen in certain pathos arguments. These articles are therefore closer to the edge of the genre set, as the writer begins to lose their measured approach to the situation.

While most articles were classified as possessing an appeal to logos, ethos, pathos, or a combination, one article was determined to fit into none of the aforementioned categories. The religious response to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting from Odyssey Online, discussed in the previous section, did not make a logos, pathos, or ethos appeal, as there was no argument being presented. The article was a statement about the writer's views, but no conclusion was ever drawn, nor was there an insinuation that readers should follow the approach being described by the writer. The genre norm indicated that logos arguments were most pronounced, and pathos and ethos arguments were used more sparingly, but, regardless of which appeal was being used, one was used in every article within the norm. The expression of some type of argument is essential to the genre of opinion journalism, suggesting that articles without an appeal to logos, ethos, or pathos — articles without an argument — are closer to the edge of the genre set. Figure 5 shows the argument variation that exists in the genre set of opinion journalism.



*Fig. 5: Articles further from the ideal approach the edge of the genre set.*

### **Expanding Evidence**

For the second phase of research, I again took note of both the use of external sources in the form of hyperlinked articles, web pages, and documents, and the use of internal sources such as personal experience. I analyzed the use of assumed knowledge as well to determine what kind of information needs a source and what kind can stand alone. The genre norm suggested that opinion journalism must be supported by facts, but the question remained whether this was consistent in other types of opinion writing.

Whereas 24 of 27 articles within the genre norm had at least one hyperlinked source to support a claim or provide evidence, only 23 of 36 later articles contained external sources. However, this number varied considerably when looking at the publications independently. All nine articles from the Huffington Post had external sources, ranging from two to 24 per article, with an average of 10.9 linked sources per article. Eight articles from BuzzFeed also contained linked sources, averaging 7.8 per article with a range from zero to 18. These articles were

therefore more saturated with external sources than the genre norm, as there was only an average of 5.3 linked sources per article in the first phase of research, with articles ranging from zero to 12 sources. Five out of nine blogs also contained external sources, but there were significantly fewer sources in those articles. The range of hyperlinks in blogs was zero to eight, with an average of only 2.8 sources per article. Only one article published in Odyssey Online contained external sources, with seven hyperlinked sources in that piece.

In total, articles published on the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed were more likely to contain sources, and were more likely to contain more sources, than articles published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Wall Street Journal*. It is possible that this is an editorial decision for the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed due to the diminished reliability of those cites. Since the three publications defining the genre norm are credible institutions, the trust that exists between the readers and the writers and editors is likely greater than the trust that readers have in the editorial team of the Huffington Post or BuzzFeed. As a result, it is possible that the latter organizations require more external sources to build that trust and to prove that their work is well-sourced, when readers may not always assume that it is. In this way, the increase in external sources found in the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed may be a response to their situation. The lack of an editorial process at Odyssey Online and personal blogs would therefore likely also explain the lack of external sources in articles on those platforms.

The reputation of the sources linked in the articles also varied. Whereas most articles within the genre norm linked to reputable news sources, specifically to the three publications being analyzed, those three publications were more rarely cited by articles in the second phase of research. Articles from the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and blogs were

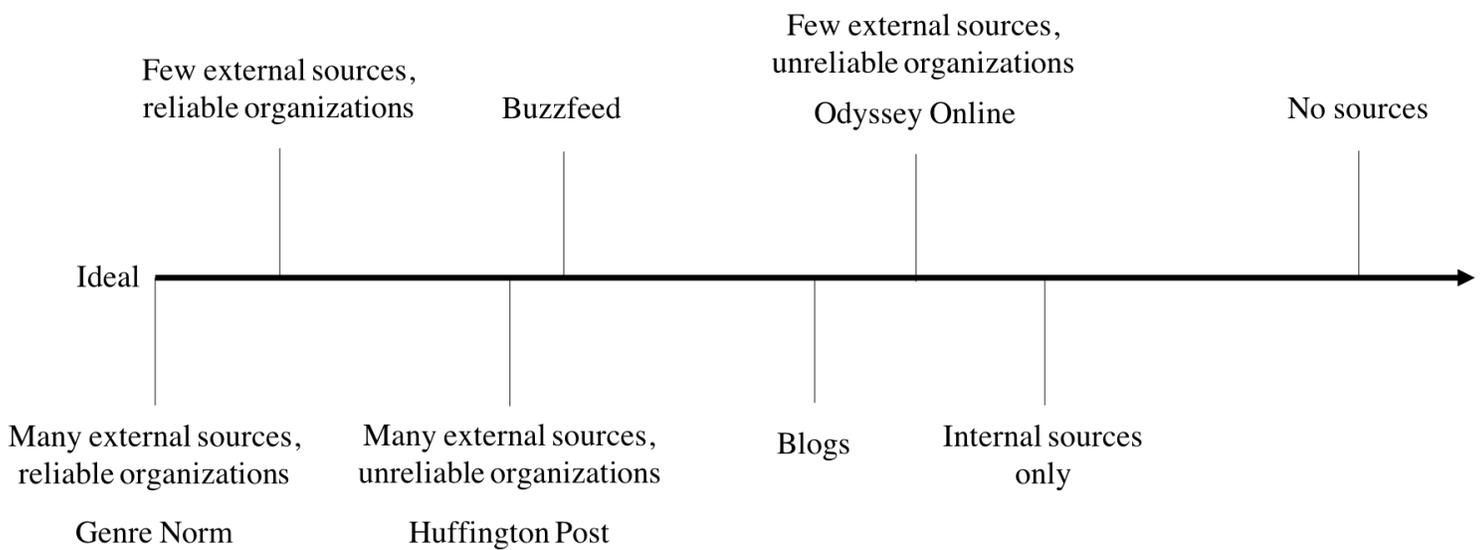
significantly more likely to use blogs, Wikipedia, and smaller, lesser-known news organizations as sources, with the full list of hyperlinked sources including:

- *The New York Times*
- PBS
- CNN
- Business Insider
- The Atlantic
- Politico
- Gallup
- Fortune.com
- DailyDot.com
- National Review
- ShepardSoftware
- DataForProgress
- Theconversation.com
- Daily Kos
- Facebook
- Breitbart
- *The New Yorker*
- NBC
- *The Washington Post*
- The Guardian
- NPR
- Vox
- Fivethirtyeight
- Yahoo.com
- QZ.com
- The Week
- Scribd.com
- The Glow Up
- DemocracyJournal.org
- EveryTownResearch.org
- YouTube
- *The Wall Street Journal*
- ABC News
- CNBC
- *The Miami Herald*
- Slate
- Reuters
- Huffington Post
- Deadline.com
- Daily News
- MotherJones
- Altnet.com
- Journal Sentinel
- DailyCaller.com
- Twitter
- Wikipedia

Therefore, while external sources existed in later articles, they were rarer, and the reliability of those sources was significantly lower than the reliability of the reputable news sources linked in the genre norm.

Only 11 of the 36 articles in the second stage of research referenced personal experience as evidence, though that was an increase from the genre norm where only four of 27 articles used

internal sources. There was only one blog and one article from the Huffington Post that used internal sources, with three and six references to personal experience in those articles, respectively. Odyssey Online had four articles use internal sources, each with two references to personal experience, and five out of nine BuzzFeed articles had internal sources, ranging from two to 12 references per article. During the first phase of research, it was found that the use of personal experience as evidence was accepted, but it certainly was not the norm. Additionally, relying exclusively on internal sources was only found in two articles of the genre norm, suggesting that it is therefore something that is seen more as one approaches the edge of the genre set. The variation of sources seen in opinion writing is shown in Figure 6.



*Fig. 6: Articles that are distanced from the ideal approach the edge of the genre set.*

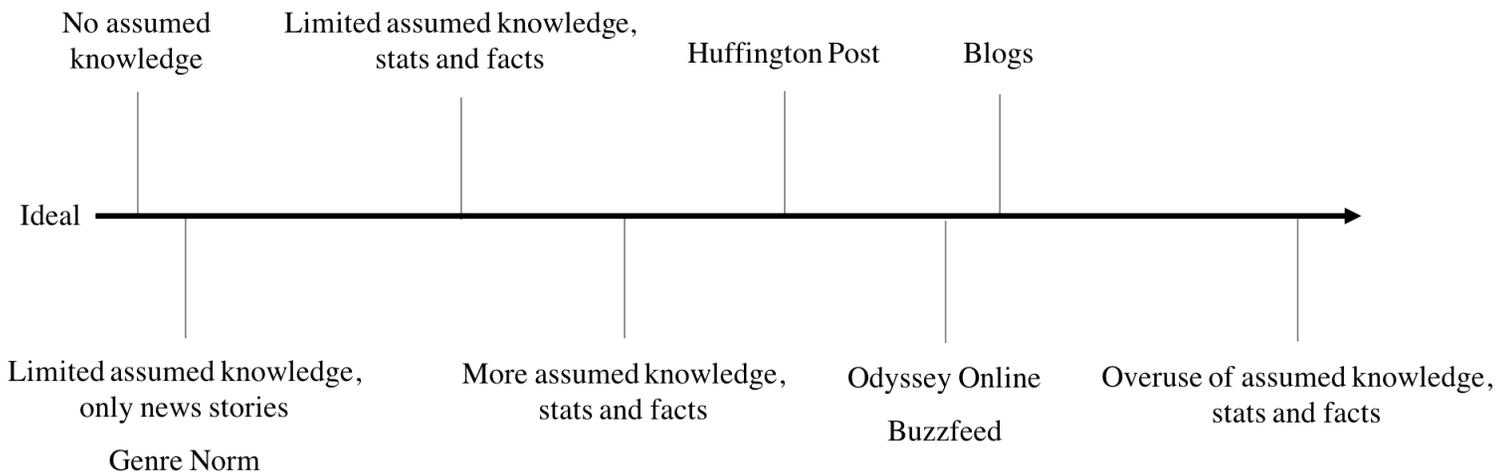
Assumed knowledge was also shown to be a genre norm that is consistent throughout the genre set, as all but two articles in the genre norm contained instances of assumed knowledge, and all but one article in the second phase of research had the same. Articles in the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and blogs were slightly more saturated with assumed

knowledge, however, with a range from two to 19 instances of assumed knowledge, compared to the range for the genre norm which was one to 12. Additionally, while the genre norm averaged 5.4 instances of assumed knowledge per article, the later articles averaged 7.2 instances.

That being said, while assumed knowledge was a consistent norm throughout the genre set, what was considered to be assumed knowledge by the writers in the second round of articles differed from the first. Whereas the genre norm generally limited instances of assumed knowledge to only include facts surrounding well-known news stories, with a few instances of unsupported statistics and quotes added in, there were many more instances of unsubstantiated statistics and quotes in the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and blogs. One example was found in an Odyssey Online article that discusses the finances of Illinois, as the article claims the state has \$154 billion in debt, a Gross Domestic Product of \$800 billion, and that it is the least-solvent state in the union with a debt ratio of 20 percent, all without providing a source to support those numbers. Another article, this one from BuzzFeed, also gave statistics about guns without any sources, writing that 47 children per day are brought into American emergency rooms with gunshot wounds, and that over 500 children in Chicago were wounded or killed by gunfire last year. Additionally, a Huffington Post article included direct quotes from Comey's Oct. 28 letter addressing Clinton's emails, though the writer did not provide a link to that letter or to any news stories about it to allow the reader to fact check the accuracy of those quotes or better understand their context.

In the second phase of research, 16 of 35 articles with assumed knowledge (45.7 percent), contained statistics or quotes without sources to support them. This was a deviation from the norm, likely due to less-rigorous editing processes. But I would argue that a heavy reliance on assumed knowledge, specifically for hard facts such as statistics and quotes, decreases the

reliability of the writing. Opinions must be based in facts in order to be opinion journalism, and if those facts are supported within the text itself, the writer proves to the reader that they have done their research. Readers can of course fact check the work themselves, but in opinion journalism (as in any type of writing) there is an understanding that exists between the writer and the reader and here, it is assumed that the writer is well-versed in their subject matter. Unless that writer proves their knowledge to be factual through outside sources, the reader is left to question this understanding. Therefore, the overuse of assumed knowledge, specifically for hard facts such as statistics and quotes, is something that exists closer to the edge of the genre set. The range of assumed knowledge found in opinion writing is shown in Figure 7.



*Fig. 7: An increase in assumed knowledge brings one closer to the edge of the genre set.*

### **Expanding the Inclusion of Self**

I again analyzed the writer’s place in a piece of opinion journalism through the use of personal pronouns in each article. The opinion articles published in the reputable news organizations showed that the use of personal pronouns is a norm of the genre, though writers rarely referenced themselves unless they were using personal experience as evidence for their argument.

Personal pronouns were used in the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and blogs for the same purposes as in the genre norm — namely, to state an opinion, to create a personal connection with the reader, or to make an ethos appeal. All but four articles from the second phase of research contained at least one personal pronoun, indicating that the inclusion of the writer in the article is a genre norm that is consistent throughout the genre set. When looking at the 21 articles that contained personal pronouns and did not use personal experience as evidence, there was one outlier with 49 personal pronouns. Removing that article from consideration, the articles ranged from one personal pronoun to 13, averaging 5.15 personal pronouns per article. This was a slight decrease from the genre norm where there was an average of 7.2 personal pronouns per article.

The 11 articles that used personal experience as evidence once again showed a drastic increase in the use of personal pronouns, also remaining consistent with the genre norm. The articles ranged from four mentions of the writer to 84, with an average of 29 personal pronouns per article. This was a larger increase than was found within the genre norm, where there was an average of 17.5 personal pronouns in articles that used personal experience. Since the use of personal pronouns, and the increase in that use when the writer used personal experience as evidence, remained consistent throughout the genre set, this is not a suitable metric to determine where the genre set ends.

### **Expanding the Genre Set**

I previously determined that the genre norms for opinion journalism suggest that an appropriate response to a situation must be measured, nuanced, political, and supported by facts. The opinions must also be located on the political spectrum, though they may differ from average

partisan tropes. Finally, all opinions must be based in facts, typically from reputable external sources, though the use of personal experience as evidence is acceptable when used sparingly.

After studying opinion writing from the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and personal blogs, I expanded the genre set of opinion journalism to include variations of the norm. I added partisan opinions, opinions that were not ideologically diverse, and articles with radical and apolitical opinions to consideration, though I determined that these opinions were all farther away from the ideal of the genre norm. I also added articles using exclusively deductive logical arguments into the analysis, although I would argue that equal representation of inductive arguments is still a genre ideal. I also considered appeals to ethos and pathos, and moments where the author becomes more emotionally invested in the subject matter were found, showing another difference from the norm. Finally, I also analyzed articles with fewer external sources, unreliable external sources, exclusively internal sources, and no sources at all as well.

### **Closing the Genre Set**

At the beginning of this research project, I sought to use Miller and Bawarshi's theories to determine the genre norms of opinion journalism, therefore defining the ideal form of the genre. As Miller's theory suggests, a genre results from a recurring situation, and that genre develops patterns of form, tone, and style because it seeks to fulfill a certain social action. Therefore, I first aimed to determine that recurring situation and social action, thus allowing me to find the patterns for opinion journalism. Additionally, as Bawarshi's theory states that genre and situation function together in a cycle, each reinforcing the other every time they recur, I also aimed to determine how opinion journalism reinforces that situation.

Through my analysis, it has become clear that the recurring situation calling for opinion journalism is a politically-divisive event. This event doesn't need to be political on its own — as was the case with the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school — but the event does need to evoke a political response. Additionally, the event needs to be divisive, since no piece of opinion journalism argues the exact same opinion; the event needs to spark enough debate as to encourage unique arguments. As I declared previously, the rhetorical purpose of all opinion journalism is to make an argument. Thus, opinion journalism aims to fulfill the social action of educating the reader on an issue, taking a political stance on that issue, and convincing the reader that the stance taken is the correct one. In order to do this, writers of opinion journalism within the genre norm stick to these patterns of form, tone, and style:

1. Articles should contain at least one hyperlinked external source, preferably from reputable news sources.
2. “Internal” sources in the form of personal experiences or personal conversations are accepted, but less so than external sources.
3. Assumed knowledge should be limited in quantity, and instances of assumed knowledge should also be limited to well-known news stories. Statistics and quotes should generally be supported by external sources.
4. Opinions should be located on the political spectrum, though they shouldn't necessarily be strictly partisan. More nuanced partisan opinions, as well as moderate opinions, are preferred.
5. Opinion articles should not be limited to one political ideology but should instead vary across the entire political spectrum.

6. Logos arguments are preferred over other appeals, and inductive and deductive reasoning are equally valid.
7. Pathos and ethos arguments are used sparingly, and pathos arguments are more acceptable as responses to certain situations than to others.
8. Writers rarely use personal pronouns, unless they are using personal experience as evidence.

Following these accepted genre norms legitimizes the writer, proving that they are educated in the genre of opinion journalism. This in turn makes the writer's opinion more credible to the reader, meaning the act of following genre norms helps a writer complete the social action of convincing the reader of the validity of their argument. As a result, writers continue to follow these norms when writing opinion journalism, therefore reinforcing those norms as the appropriate response to a situation calling for opinion journalism, resulting in Bawarshi's cycle of recurrence.

Once I categorized the ideal, I then took the next step to expand the genre set of opinion journalism using Devitt's theory. As Devitt states that there is a spectrum of appropriate written responses to any given situation, I analyzed similar forms of opinion writing from the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, and personal blogs in order to see how they differed from the norm, the ultimate goal being to determine what falls within the genre set of opinion journalism and what must be excluded.

### **Defining Opinion**

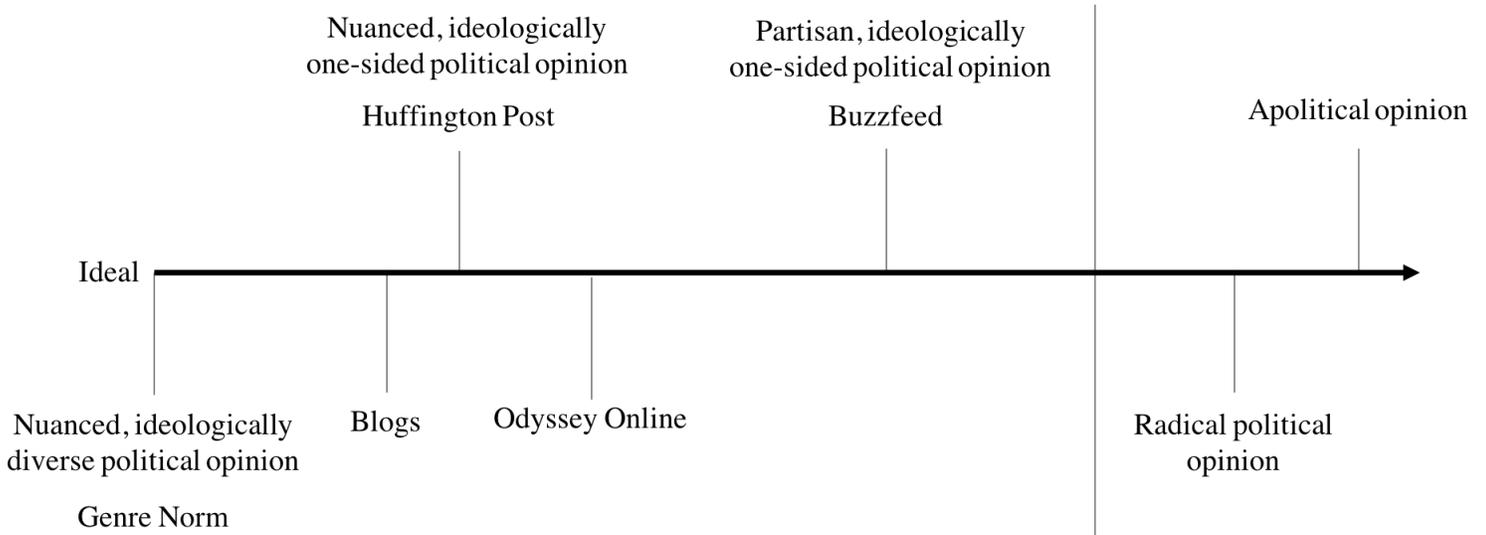
I considered a majority of articles both in the norm and in the later phase of research to be "nuanced," as they argued opinions that differed from typical partisan tropes. However, articles

within the genre norm were more ideologically diverse, containing more opinions that varied along the political spectrum. Comparatively, articles from the second phase of research were far more left-leaning.

While the norm suggests that opinion journalism should be ideologically diverse, I would argue that political diversity is not essential to determining opinion journalism from regular opinion. Opinion journalism is meant to display a wide range of political thought and, although equal representation of ideas would help achieve that goal more democratically, equal representation is not necessary to that end, only some representation is. Likewise, while nuanced political thought is favored in the genre norm and elsewhere in the genre set, more average, partisan opinions were also found to be well-represented in both phases of research, showing that those opinions should also be accepted both within the norm and within the larger genre set, though they are not ideal.

That being said, I also found that some articles in the second phase of research contained opinions that were apolitical or too radical to be considered on the mainstream political spectrum. As mentioned previously, the appropriate response to a situation calling for opinion journalism must be political, as all opinion journalism within the genre norm contained some aspect of a political argument. Therefore, I have eliminated apolitical arguments from the genre set. Articles must also be able to be classified on the mainstream political spectrum in order to be considered opinion journalism because journalism as a whole is an industry with strong ethics. Just as there are limits on free speech, there are also limits on what can and can't be published — opinions must be justifiable in order to be considered journalism. Once a writer leaves the political mainstream and enters a more “fringe” range of opinion, that writer is no longer

presenting a justifiable opinion, and it would therefore be unethical to present that article as journalism. Figure 8 shows the acceptable range of opinions within the genre set.



*Fig. 8: Articles with radical opinions and apolitical opinions are excluded from the set.*

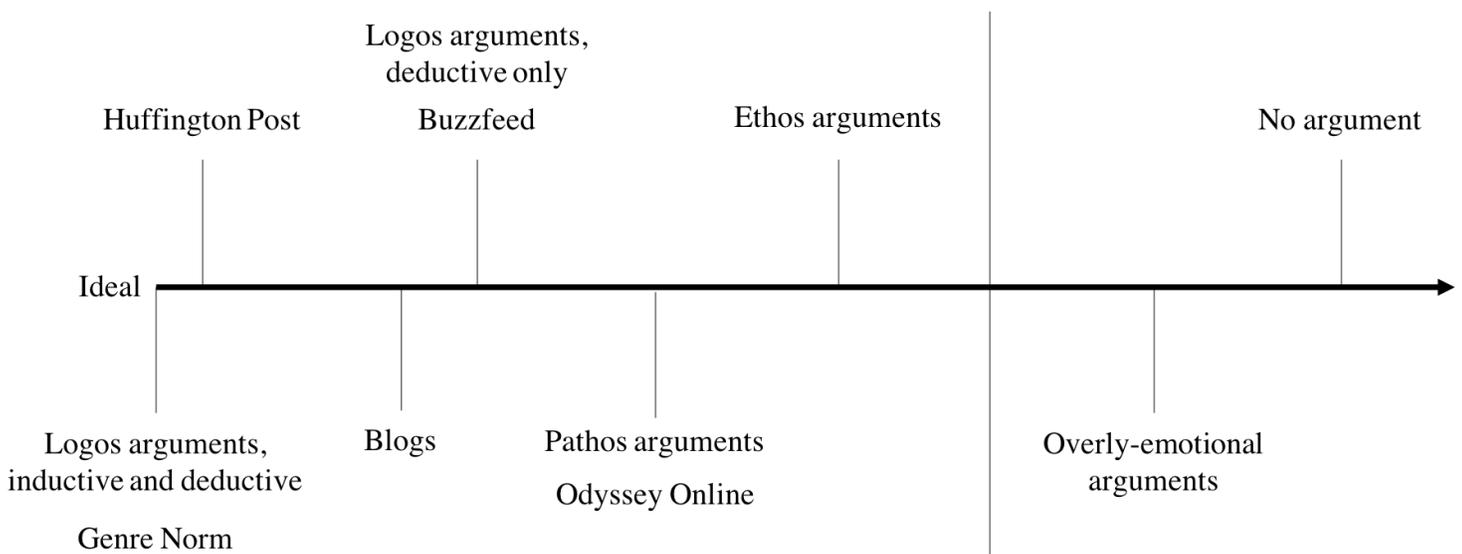
### **Defining Rhetorical Purpose**

I found that logical arguments were preferred throughout the genre set, and pathos and ethos arguments were also represented, though they were used more sparingly. However, an equal representation of inductive and deductive arguments was shown to be a genre norm that was not consistent throughout the genre set, as articles in the second phase of research heavily preferred the simpler deductive argument. That being said, a lack of inductive arguments does not disqualify these articles from the genre set, as deductive arguments were represented and therefore shown to be legitimate in the genre norm.

Writers in the second phase of research were also found to inadvertently deviate from genre norms, showing moments when an appeal to pathos or ethos can be taken to an extreme. These moments — exemplified by cursing, advocating for violence, using gore, employing ad-

hominem attacks, or otherwise making an overly-emotional connection to the subject matter — were times when the writing became an inappropriate response to the situation. The writers in the genre norm, and most writers within the larger genre set, kept a measured emotional distance from their subject matter, even when discussing personal matters or using a pathos appeal. These articles broke that norm and lost the measured approach that is generally seen as credible for a writer of opinion journalism, therefore excluding these arguments from the genre set.

Additionally, one article in the second phase of research was found to have no argument at all, eliminating that article from the genre set as the rhetorical purpose of opinion journalism is to make an argument. If a piece of writing is not fulfilling that purpose, it is not opinion journalism. Figure 9 shows the range of acceptable argument styles within the genre set.



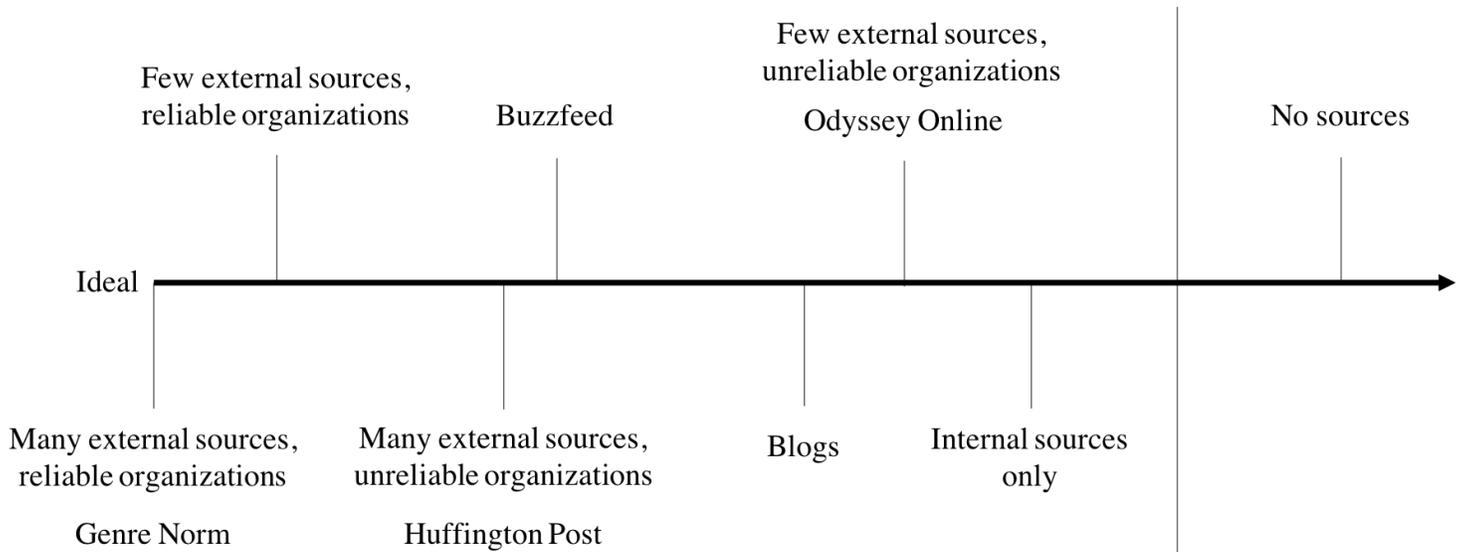
*Fig. 9: Overly-emotional articles and those without an argument at all are excluded.*

### **Defining Evidence**

The presence of external, hyperlinked sources was also a norm that persisted throughout the genre set, though certain publications had articles with very few sources. However, while the use

of external sources was seen in articles analyzed in the second phase of research, the reliability of those sources was at times significantly lower than in the articles defining the genre norm. Therefore, while articles in the second phase of research supported their arguments with evidence, that evidence was not as strong as evidence would ideally be. While this may have weakened the arguments made in the later articles, it does not disqualify them from the genre set entirely, as the writers were still able to base their arguments in facts.

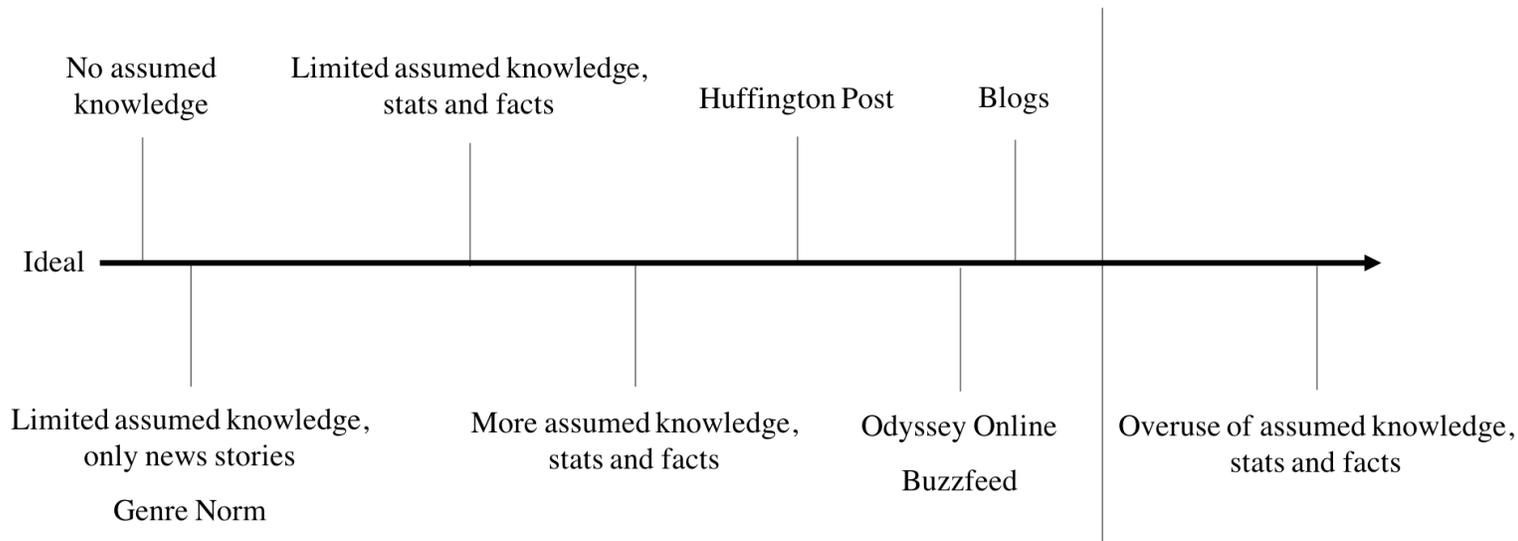
Articles without any external sources typically contained internal sources in the form of personal experience in order to support their claims, as was the case in three of the articles within the genre norm. However, relying exclusively on internal sources was seen far more in the second phase of research than in the genre norm, showing that this is a feature that is closer to the border of the genre set. Relying on internal sources is certainly not ideal in opinion journalism, as it limits the fact-checking abilities of both the editor and the reader, therefore decreasing the reliability of the writer. However, when evoking pathos or ethos arguments, hard facts such as statistics and quotes may not always be necessary. Therefore, an article supported exclusively by internal sources is acceptable, though only in limited circumstances. An article with no sources, however, cannot be included in the genre set, since it can no longer be assumed that the article is factual. Opinion journalism must be based in facts, even if those facts are specific to the writer, and a reader can't determine if that is the case unless the writer includes evidence. As a result, I have excluded articles with no sources — external or internal — from the genre set. The spectrum of acceptable evidence for opinion journalism is shown in Figure 10.



*Fig. 10: An article must have sources to be considered in the genre set.*

### **Defining Assumed Knowledge**

I was able to find instances of assumed knowledge in both the first and second phases of research, although what was considered to be assumed knowledge differed in each case. Whereas publications within the genre norm generally only accepted unsourced facts when discussing well-known news stories, there were many more instances of unsubstantiated statistics and quotes in the second phase of research. This deviation from the norm was likely due to less-rigorous editing processes in the later publications but, just as a reliance on internal sources decreased the reliability of the writer, so does a heavy reliance on assumed knowledge, specifically for hard facts. If a writer does not include sources when using things like statistics and quotes, the reader cannot assume that the writer has done their research, or that they are well-versed in their subject matter. This can hinder the trust that should exist between writer and reader, making the overuse of unsupported fact something that exists outside of the genre set. The range of appropriate uses of assumed knowledge is shown in Figure 11.



*Fig. 11: Assumed knowledge is acceptable, but it should be limited.*

### **Distinguishing Opinions from Opinion Journalism**

Based on this research, I have altered the genre norms of opinion journalism to include the entire genre set as follows:

1. Articles should contain at least one hyperlinked external source, preferably from reputable news sources, though hyperlinked sources from non-reputable sources are also accepted.
2. “Internal” sources in the form of personal experiences or personal conversations are accepted, but only when hard facts and statistics are not needed to support the argument being made.
3. Assumed knowledge should be limited in quantity, and instances of assumed knowledge should also be limited to well-known news stories. Statistics and quotes should generally be supported by external sources, although unsupported statistics and quotes are minimally accepted.

4. Opinions should be located on the mainstream political spectrum, though they shouldn't necessarily be strictly partisan. More nuanced partisan opinions, as well as moderate opinions, are preferred.
5. Opinion articles should ideally vary across the entire political spectrum, although this is not a requirement.
6. Logos arguments are preferred over other appeals, and inductive and deductive reasoning are equally valid.
7. Pathos and ethos arguments are used less than logos arguments, and pathos arguments are more acceptable as responses to certain situations than to others.
8. Personal pronouns are rarely used, unless the writer is also using personal experience as evidence.

### **Conclusion**

Our current cultural moment has been transformative for journalism, not just because of the major digital push that we have seen in recent years, but also because of the deep societal mistrust for the practice of journalism that has come to the surface. The legitimacy of journalism is being questioned constantly, most notably by the president himself, which has harmed the reputation of the industry, likely for generations to come. And unfortunately, at the precise moment that people have begun to lose faith in journalism as a whole, it has become more and more difficult to determine what journalism is.

As our world becomes more opinion-saturated, distinguishing opinion journalism from ordinary opinion becomes harder, but it also becomes more important. That is why, at the onset of this research, I posed the question: Out of the multitude of opinions published everywhere

from newspapers to magazines to blogs to social media, how does one decide which texts deserve the marking of “journalism?” Devitt’s theory allowed me to ask this question analytically, using culture as a framework to consider how this specific moment in time might be changing the genre of opinion journalism forever.

Now, I don’t know for sure that the genre is permanently changing, but there is no doubt that it is changing. After all, the articles from the second phase of research — all from digital-only platforms — have only existed for the last decade or so, and yet the articles that were published on those platforms have already succeeded in chipping away at the standard for journalism that has been established, pushing the genre to places it hasn’t gone before, and maybe to places that it didn’t necessarily want to go.

This is, of course, not to say that most articles from the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Odyssey Online, or blogs were categorized as being beyond the genre set, because it was actually only a very small minority that had to be excluded from the genre entirely. This is also not to say that the expansions to the genre set were monumental. In fact, the list of features that define the genre set is very similar to the list of features that define the genre norm. But those slight changes were nevertheless significant, as they make room in the genre set for an entirely new crop of writing — no articles from the aforementioned platforms were identical to the norm, as they all contained at least some variation from the established standard.

If one were to conduct a blind reading, they would likely be able to distinguish an opinion article published in *The New York Times* from one published on BuzzFeed. But, as we begin to transition away from print journalism and toward digital journalism, that distinction is likely going to be harder and harder to make. What does this mean for opinion journalism as a whole? Well, it’s hard to say. But as the norm has already begun to expand to include more and

more variation, it is likely that the norm may one day shift entirely. Maybe sources will eventually be deemed irrelevant. Emotional appeals may someday be more widely regarded than logical ones. Political responses may be viewed as archaic in the distant future, and personal responses will reign supreme. It's impossible to know what will change but through this research, it is clear that change is not only possible, but it is probable.

The changes to the genre norm that I found may be due to factors relating to the digital platform that I haven't considered, such as data analytics. The changes might also simply be due to different editing standards, or the lack of an editing process entirely. But I would also argue that it is possible that the norms for journalism are changing because our culture is changing. In America, there is a general stereotype of an "expert" — someone who is knowledgeable but detached, unemotional, strictly logical, maybe even cold. Think of a surgeon in a movie; they're probably doing their work efficiently, but with little personal connection to the task at hand. Americans have developed a culture in which this detachment is an appropriate response to most professional situations, and the genre norm of opinion journalism reflects that: The articles defining the norm relied heavily on logos arguments, with very few emotional or personal responses to the situations. But in recent years, our political sphere has begun to support more "passionate" viewpoints, expressed by people who speak with emotion. A survivor of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, Emma Gonzalez, immediately comes to mind as an example: At the March for Our Lives — a march that she helped organize and was effectively the face of — she made a speech that was impassioned and deeply personal. Gonzalez wasn't detached or unemotional as an expert "should" be, she was angry and she noticeably crying as she talked about her personal experience with gun violence. Maybe opinion journalism is in part

changing because these viewpoints are no longer seen as less legitimate than the strong, cold viewpoint that has been held in high esteem in the past.

As an editor myself, I found it difficult at points to conduct this research and write it in an unbiased way. I couldn't help but notice the voices that this genre set seems to eliminate or delegitimize — those that are overly-emotional, those that rely on the writer's experience rather than hard facts, and those that are personal rather than political — but in my job, I play a part in acting as a gatekeeper for those very texts in my everyday life. When writing about the “ideal” form of the genre, do I really mean *my* ideal form of the genre?

There is certainly a way of writing that is considered the “right” way to write journalism — even opinion journalism — and as an editor, it is my job to ensure that the writing I publish is as close to that “right” way as possible. But I find it uplifting that some of those restrictions may be lifting, granting access for those with different stories to tell, or different ways to tell them. Opinion journalism is ultimately all about completing the social actions of educating the reader on an issue, taking a political stance on that issue, and convincing the reader that the stance taken is the correct one, and while there may be a “proper” way to accomplish those goals according to the publications that define the genre, I would argue that there are many ways one could go about that task. In fact, sometimes a personal, emotional response may even do a better job connecting with the reader and convincing them of your position than a logical, detached article ever could. I believe that the changes we are seeing in opinion journalism today are not only better reflecting our political moment in which passion and engagement are encouraged, but the changes are also potentially reflecting a societal and cultural shift. By welcoming more voices and more stories, opinion journalism is becoming a more inclusive platform, and one that better represents the population it is supposed to serve.

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