

OPINIONS

In defense of journalists

CHRISTA KELLY, STAFF WRITER

UPCOMING EVENTS

Celebration and
thank you for
Jon Vaughn-Fier
12/7 @ 3 PM
CWC

Augsburg
Concert Band
12/8 @ 2 PM
Hoversten Chapel

NAMI
Listening Tour
12/10 @ 6 PM
CC Student Lounge

Vocal Jazz
Performance
12/10 @ 7 PM
Sateren Auditorium

Morning Chapel:
Wonder Incarnate
12/11 @ 11:30 AM
Hoversten Chapel

This week, one of my classes was discussing the ethics of journalism. One student blatantly stated that, in his opinion, most journalists weren't looking out for the good of the people. Instead, he felt they were searching for sensationalism in order to obtain money and fame. Students around him murmured in agreement.

There's a difficult dichotomy in today's world that Americans are forced to reconcile. The press is being attacked and demonized by people in positions of power, threatening our democracy. However, coexisting with this truth, there is a wave of falsehoods and rumors washing over social media daily. The issue that we have in today's world is condemning the latter without casting doubt on journalism as a whole.

When we fall into the trap of making blanket statements about the integrity of the press or sinking to believing attacks on the "fake news media," we become part of the problem. As we've seen with the reports about the use of Cambridge Analytica during the 2016 election and Russian interference in social media, fake news definitely exists. However, the news organizations and journalists most frequently being accused of fabrication by those in power aren't always doing so. The President frequently decries

the work of organizations like the "New York Times," CNN, and even most recently, his own administration's climate change research panel.

Why do powerful people cast doubt upon legitimate news? I would argue that it's because in this age, they can. If you can rebuke legitimate news when it doesn't suit your worldview, why wouldn't you? The rise of the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter shows that social media allows for cries of injustice to finally be heard. This gives the perpetrators of injustice something to fear. In contrast, the movement gives journalists a tool to speak truth to power. The job of citizens is to learn, discern between fact and fiction and then evaluate what must be done in response. It is the second part that people today are struggling with.

But how do we individually work to remedy this problem? The first seemingly obvious step to take is to check our facts. Research can stop a great deal of misunderstandings and misinformation.

Second is to consciously defend journalists. They're doing arguably one of the most important jobs in our society. Their work holds people accountable and gives us the information that we use to make political decisions, thus ensuring a stable democracy. It is imperative that we collectively protect

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them, protesting when they are unjustly attacked, such as in the case of Jim Acosta, and speaking up when others unfairly reject their work.

Finally, we must accept their work. This includes not demanding that they ignore a story because it makes us uncomfortable or inherently dismissing something because it disagrees with our point of view.

Journalism speaks to the ordinary citizens. When it speaks, we must listen, and we must act. Steve Almond, best-selling author and journalist, wrote that one of the most important lessons that he has learned is that journalism "could, on occasion, hold the powerful to account. But it could not awaken the conscience of the powerful, nor rescue those most in need." That is our own job. We can't do this if we don't first let the journalists write.