

**CONNECTICUT SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS INDEPENDENT REVIEW
OF SELECT CONTEST ENTRIES**

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I. INTRODUCTION

In June, reports surfaced that New Canaan News reporter Paresh Jha had engaged in a series of fabrications published under his byline. After investigations by editors at Hearst Connecticut Newspapers, owners of the New Canaan News, and other outside media determined that Mr. Jha had fabricated elements and sources in as many as 25 news stories, he was fired from his job. The newspaper, to its credit, removed many of the articles under Mr. Jha's byline from its online news sites.

In 2011, Mr. Jha's journalistic articles won two awards from the Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists in the community non-daily division: **1) First Place for in-depth reporting; 2) Third Place for feature writing.**

Because of concerns about the validity of these stories and the integrity of the Connecticut SPJ ("CTSPJ") awards, the CTSPJ Board of Directors sought outside advice. This report is the culmination of an investigation into Mr. Jha's two award-winning stories. This report details findings on the veracity of accounts, identity of sources and other elements of only the two award-winning stories. This report also makes recommendations for how the CTSPJ should deal with the awards given to Mr. Jha.

II. ABOUT CONNECTICUT SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS

The Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists has been in existence for nearly 30 years, working "to improve and protect journalism" and to promote "the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry and works to inspire and educated the next generation of journalists," its website states.

The national Society of Professional Journalists is one of the oldest and largest journalism trade groups in the United States, originating in 1909 at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., as the Sigma Delta Chi journalism fraternity. With about 8,000 members, SPJ has professional chapters across the country and student chapters at many universities and colleges. SPJ's mission is to promote journalism and journalistic values. The society holds national and regional conferences, runs national and regional and college awards competitions and otherwise serves as a vanguard for the journalism industry in the United States. SPJ has also crafted a widely-respected Code of Ethics which provides journalists with useful guidance on a range of ethical standards.

III. CONNECTICUT SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM CONTEST

The Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists holds an annual Excellence in Journalism contest to recognize strong journalism in the State of Connecticut. The awards are open to CTSPJ members as well as non-members. The benefit to members is a lower entrance fee. The contest has 11 divisions ranging from Daily Newspaper with circulation above 50,000 to online independent and online affiliated sites. Within each division there are 31 categories ranging from traditional reporting and editorial writing to sports, business, photography and multimedia.

The CTSPJ website includes a wealth of information about the awards, including information about the fees, the accepted format for articles and the judges. The site includes a FAQ page. The contest guidelines include no further information about contest standards or the

entrants' warranties on the entries. The entry fee for active CTSPJ members is \$10 while it is \$25 for non-members and news organizations.

CTSPJ engages a number of outside judges for the awards. Judges include professionals and academics.

IV. BACKGROUND

This report is not a background investigation of Paresh Jha. But it is important to address his background. No source interviewed, including his former employers, said they had current contact information for Mr. Jha. Hearst Connecticut Editor David McCumber and Mr. Jha's direct editor at the New Canaan News Ashley Varese, said Mr. Jha's company-owned cell phone was returned and his company email account disabled. They reported no further contact information for Mr. Jha.

The New Canaan News is a weekly newspaper with reported circulation of 7,000, serving the Town of New Canaan.¹ It is one of a dozen Hearst-owned newspapers in Connecticut. Mr. Jha worked for the New Canaan News from September 2010 until his firing in June 2012. His LinkedIn page says his duties included: "Investigate, report, and write stories daily for the print and web about every aspect of town including government, education, crime and occasionally sports. Stories include quick briefs as well as in-depth features and interviews." The description also explains his duties regarding Facebook and Twitter accounts and his relationship to sources: "Develop and maintain relationships with sources like government officials, PR agents and other members of the community." He also makes references to Hearst Corporation structure and other Hearst newspapers, saying that "many of my articles make it into the Stamford Advocate and Connecticut Post on a weekly basis as well."

¹ Bacon's Media Directory 2012.

Mr. Jha holds a bachelor's degree in molecular and cell biology from the University of Connecticut, earned in 2009. This was confirmed by the university. His LinkedIn page lists a four-month stint as a Game Concept Consultant for Red Chilies Entertainment, a four-month internship at the Bleacher Report website and college experience as a copy editor and staff writer for The Daily Campus, the student newspaper at the University of Connecticut. His description of his copy editor job says, "Consistently edited submissions to The Daily Campus for factual and grammatical mistakes once a week. Assisted in graphical layout of the publication as well." His LinkedIn profile also says Mr. Jha speaks Hindi and earned the honor of Eagle Scout. Officials at the Boy Scouts of America would not confirm his status without his written consent.

Hearst Editor David McCumber said 25 stories written by Mr. Jha contained quotes from "non-existent sources." Mr. McCumber said that editors reviewed every story Mr. Jha wrote for Hearst Newspapers. Although editors did not go through every story written by Mr. Jha word-by-word with him, Hearst editors compiled a list of suspicious names from Mr. Jha's stories. These were names and identities that could not be confirmed, Mr. McCumber said in an email. After reciting the list in a meeting with Hearst editors, Mr. McCumber said, "A few minutes later, when he confessed to fabricating, I said, 'I'm not going to find any of those people am I, Paresh?' and he said 'No you're not.'"

After repeated efforts to reach Mr. Jha proved unavailing, contact was established on July 25. In a brief telephone interview for this investigation, Mr. Jha openly admitted his fabrications to as many as 25 stories, including one of the award-winning pieces. He called his actions "wrong," "regrettable" and "misguided."

V. ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION

This report summarizes findings based on an investigation performed by Roy S. Gutterman, associate professor of communications law and journalism and director of the Tully Center for Free Speech at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. (See **Appendix B** for bio).

The investigation consisted of a detailed reading of “Teachers, students weigh in on Twain Controversy” (“**Mark Twain**” story), which won third place for feature writing, and “Enabling underage partying” package (“**Underage Drinking**” package), which won first place for in-depth reporting. A list of all sources was created and reviewed. This list included human sources quoted and paraphrased in both stories as well as a range of documents and secondary sources referred to in the two award-winning packages.

The identity of every person quoted or paraphrased in the story was run through general internet search engines, Google, two subscription-based news databases, Lexis-Nexis and NewsBank and popular social media websites, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Efforts to reach all human sources included emailing and calling each person. Each person contacted was interviewed on the telephone.

News and scholarly articles Mr. Jha referred to and relied on for his stories were obtained. A freedom of information act request under Connecticut’s open records law was also filed with the New Canaan Police Department to obtain a police report for an incident described in Underage Drinking. This investigation also compared coverage in other local news sites, particularly, New Canaan Patch and the New Canaan Advertiser.

This report does not reflect the views of Syracuse University, the Newhouse School or its officers.

VI. ANALYSIS

a) “Teachers, students weigh in on Twain Controversy” (February 4, 2011)

This feature story details a local reaction to a new, sanitized version of the Mark Twain classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by Alan Gribben, an Auburn University professor. This controversial topic was the basis of numerous print and broadcast news stories, including one in the *New York Times* January 5, 2011.

The story emerged from a conversation between Heidi D’Acosta and Mr. Jha in which D’Acosta, New Canaan High School English Department chair, was pitching an unrelated story to Mr. Jha. She could not recall the topic of that story, but remembers that a snow storm forced cancellation of the event and Mr. Jha did not cover it. The Huck Finn controversy came up in their conversation and Mr. Jha came in for an interview shortly thereafter. Mr. Jha sought to localize a national story even though the school district was not considering using the new expurgated version of Huck Finn.

The story quotes the following people:

- Howard Benedict, a long-time New Canaan High School English teacher.
- Evan Remley, a 10-year New Canaan High School English teacher.
- Kristen Brown, five-year New Canaan High School English teacher.
- GerShun Avilez, assistant professor of English and African American studies at Yale University.
- Heidi D’Acosta, New Canaan High School English teacher for 34 years and English department chair.

- Mike McAteer, a 16-year New Canaan High School English teacher and student newspaper advisor.
- Ellen Trinklein, opinion editor of the New Canaan High School student newspaper, the NCHS Courant.

After Mr. Jha's fabrications surfaced, Ashley Varese, Mr. Jha's editor at the New Canaan News, went back to "vet" this story. In an email response to this inquiry, Ms. Varese detailed her investigation, which consisted of comparing the names of the high school teachers to the school's public website, reviewing the student newspaper column and the New York Times article cited in the story, and checking GerShun Avilez's name on Yale University's website. Thus, she confirmed that all sources quoted in this story do exist. In the interview for this investigation, Mr. Jha characterized this story as "completely factual and real."

This investigation confirms the identities of all the sources quoted in this story. All the named, quoted sources were interviewed for this investigation. Ms. Trinklein was not interviewed because her quote was attributed to a column she wrote for the Courant, the New Canaan High School student newspaper. The column was also reprinted in the New Canaan News as a side bar.

The five NCHS English teachers interviewed for this investigation confirmed that they were indeed interviewed for the story. Names for two teachers were misspelled: Kristen Brown was spelled "Kristene" and Heidi D'Acosta was referred to as "Acosta" in the article.

Three teachers expressed concerns over how they were quoted in the article and two had concerns with the implication that they were each individually interviewed. Four teachers – D'Acosta, Brown, Remley and McAteer – were interviewed simultaneously in a group interview

that took place during a roughly 30-minute span over their lunch hour at an oblong table in the English Department in late January or early February 2011.

In interviews for this investigation, the teachers said the quotes were gathered from a setting they described as roundtable discussion among the teachers. Mr. Jha took notes and occasionally interjected questions. None could remember or confirm whether Mr. Jha recorded the discussion. Mr. Jha mostly transcribed the discussion among the teachers, they said. Many quotes were reactions to their conversation.

A fair reading of this story suggests that each quote was gathered through individual one-on-one interviews between the reporter and each source. It would have been simple for Mr. Jha to indicate that four of the teachers were interviewed as a group. That detail would have been more transparent and more accurate about how this story was reported.

Ms. Brown and Mr. McAteer also expressed concerns that many of the quotes were taken out of context, improperly attributed to them or outright incorrect. Both Ms. Brown and Mr. McAteer were incredulous that this article won an award. Mr. McAteer, who also teaches journalism and advises the student newspaper, said after the story was published, he used it as an example of “poor journalism” in his class. Nobody, however, complained to the newspaper about the story’s accuracy. Some of those quoted did not read the story after it was initially published.

“I just don’t think it was word-for-word what I said,” Ms. Brown said in a telephone interview. “It was the general idea, though. I remember being frustrated at the time. People thought that he did not pick the best parts of our conversation.” Mr. McAteer was more critical: “I was unpleasantly surprised when I read this. There were definitely problems with a quote attributed to the wrong person.” He added, “I remember using the story as a lesson to slowing down an interview if it goes too fast and some of the problems with quotes.”

Mr. Benedict, a long-time English teacher who is no longer with the school district, confirmed that Mr. Jha interviewed him, “most likely” in his classroom. Quoted directly three times and paraphrased twice, Mr. Benedict said the quotes “sounded” like things he would say on this topic. He acknowledged that a couple direct quotes may not have been 100 percent accurate. One quote, in particular, troubled Mr. Benedict because grammatically, it made no sense to him:

“African Americans have a proud history,” Benedict said. “But that word says more about the Caucasian American if you will, than it does about African American.”

After reading the quote to him, Mr. Benedict said, “He may have lost something in the note-taking. I’m not sure if it is accurate. It sounds like a word may have been left out. Grammatically, it doesn’t make sense.” He added, “As an English teacher, I try to make grammatical sense.”

From the roundtable discussion, Mr. Remley, who was quoted directly three times and paraphrased twice, and Ms. D’Acosta, who was quoted once, said they were accurately quoted. Prof. Avilez confirmed that Mr. Jha interviewed him for between five to 10 minutes for the article. He read the piece shortly after publication and felt the article was accurate.

In addition to the quotes taken out of context or misattributed, Mr. McAteer had problems with the fact that no students were quoted, particularly students of color about a story with significant implications about race and history.

b. Secondary Sources

The article builds on references from a New York Times article published on January 5, 2011. Deep into the story, Mr. Jha uses a direct quote from the NewSouth Books publisher,

Suzanne La Rosa, which is properly attributed to the New York Times. This is the only reference to the New York Times. However, there are similarities in language to the New York Times article.

New Canaan News	New York Times “Publisher Tinkers with Twain,” Julie Bosman, The New York Times, January 5, 2011, p. 12.
The main characters use the word “nigger,” a current derogatory racial slur that was commonplace in that era, several times throughout the novel, 219 times to be exact. Gribben and NewSouth have replaced that word with “slave” and also substituted ‘injun’ with “Indian.”	Throughout the book – 219 times in all – the word “nigger” is replaced by “slave,” a substitution that was made by NewSouth Books, a publisher based in Alabama, which plans to release the edition in February.
Recently, Alan Gribben, an English Professor at Auburn University, approached the publisher NewSouth Books with a proposition to change something.	Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University at Montgomery, approached the publisher with the idea in July.

Mr. Jha’s article also refers to a Time Magazine article, which makes references to other historic efforts to sanitize Mark Twain, including films by CBS and Disney. It is unclear what article this refers to. On January 5, 2011, Newsfeed.time.com ran a five paragraph blurb which makes no reference to CBS or Disney. There appears to be no hard-copy story akin to this. Megan Friedman, editor of Newsfeed and author of the Time online piece, said this was the only reference to the Huck Finn controversy that came up in her search of Time’s database.

A review of Time Magazine’s online, subscription-based, archives for this investigation turned up no coverage of Huckleberry Finn that makes reference to sanitized CBS or Disney films of Mark Twain classics. A review of Time’s online articles, some dating back to 1970, was unable to confirm a source for this statement.

While the article properly attributes a quote to Ms. La Rosa, these other two passages appear a little too close to the language in the New York Times. However, there may be only so many ways to cover the same issue.

c. Underage Drinking – “Enabling underage partying.”

The underage drinking package consisted of three stories under Mr. Jha’s byline and two text boxes of data about laws relating to underage drinking and an excerpt from a University of Michigan Study.

The three stories ran on the News’s front page under a five column headline, “Enabling underage partying” with each story under its own separate headline:

- “Officials: Parents liable for drinking parties” (“**Officials**”)
- “Experts: Adults must have role in prevention” (“**Experts**”)
- “Permissive parenting has dangerous consequences” (“**Permissive parenting**”)

In total, these stories quoted eight people and referred to a handful of other sources.

There was significant overlap between the three stories. Most of the human sources were quoted in multiple stories.

At the outset, editors at the News have acknowledged that two of the quoted sources in the story, Peg Allaway and her son Riley, could not be verified. In the course of the newspaper’s own investigation, Mr. McCumber acknowledged that editors had been unable to verify these individuals and he believes that given Mr. Jha’s admissions to fabrications, he doubts these people exist. Two direct quotes were attributed to Peg Allaway and three to Riley Allaway.

This investigation was unable to uncover any shred of evidence that either Peg or Riley Allaway exists. Their names were run through Google, online telephone directories, online

property and tax records databases for New Canaan, Lexis-Nexis and NewsBank databases and popular social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. New Canaan police Sgt. Carol Ogrinc also plugged the Allaway names into police databases and found nothing. Furthermore, every source contacted throughout this investigation for both stories was asked about Peg and Riley Allaway. Responses were uniform: “never heard of the Allaways.”

When editors confronted Mr. Jha, he acknowledged that these two people were indeed fabricated. In the interview for this investigation, Mr. Jha admitted that he created the two people to flesh out the story. “(In the) alcohol package the two fabricated sources were Riley and Peg Allaway and their quotes are not real,” he said. Of the Allaway names, he said, “It was just something I came up with. I really don’t know how I came up with it, it was just something that just came about.”

The six people quoted in the stories expressed a range of thoughts about how they were quoted. Of the six, only Robert Curry and Sgt. Ogrinc said they were entirely and accurately quoted throughout the stories.

While the other four acknowledged that too much time has passed for them to say they with certainty that they were or were not quoted with 100 percent accuracy, the consensus among them can be summarized with “he was close enough.”

The following people were interviewed for this investigation:

- Barbara Greenberg, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist and teen addiction specialist.
- Robert Curry, a New Canaan parent, addiction expert and organizer of the parents’ events.
- Dr. Sangeeta Appel, New Canaan parent and facilitator in the parents’ group.

- Sgt. Carol Ogrinc, New Canaan police department, youth division.
- Frank McCoy, Hartford attorney.
- Sen. Toni Boucher, R-26th state senate district.

The overall tone of the three stories is difficult to grasp. The quotes are long and many seem to just be stacked on top of one another. Sources are introduced with little background.

Most of the quoted sources did not have problems with the quotations attributed to them because much of the language attributed to them is in line with their advocacy. Only Sen. Boucher had problems with the quotes attributed to her.

Two parents repeatedly quoted in the stories, Robert Curry and Sangeeta Appel are leaders in the New Canaan community's fight against teenage substance and alcohol abuse. They had been quoted in several other news stories, including one Mr. Jha had published in New Canaan News's online edition on September 29, 2010 ("Active and healthy parenting programs come to New Canaan"). New Canaan Patch also quoted Curry at length in an April 5, 2010 story ("Parents Get Schooled on Teen Substance Abuse") and Mr. Curry, Dr. Appel and Sgt. Ogrinc were quoted in a May 7, 2010, New Canaan Patch article ("Stopping Teen Substance Abuse will involve Homework for Parents.") Mr. Curry also published a piece on New Canaan Patch in September 2011.

The central story to the package, "Officials," begins with a two-paragraph anecdotal lead about an August 2011 house party and a fourth paragraph referring to Lori Underwood, a 47-year-old New Canaan mother who was found hiding in a closet during an alcohol-infused teen party that was broken up by police. The article makes no reference to efforts to contact Ms. Underwood. For this investigation, a freedom of information act request for the police report on

this incident is still pending, and may not be released until after the case against Ms. Underwood is completed in January 2013, the New Canaan police department stated in a letter.

Sgt. Ogrinc confirmed this incident. The information given to reporters emerged from her weekly Monday morning press briefing, she said. Mr. Jha wrote a six-paragraph police blotter story on this, published August 31, 2011, in Hearst's Stamford Advocate.com. This incident was also subject of reports on September 1, 2011, on New Canaan Patch and a September 8, 2011, police blotter story in the New Canaan Daily Voice.

This anecdote serves as a lead in to introduce the story, but it really is left hanging atop the story without much more background. From a pure fairness standpoint, it is surprising Ms. Underwood or her lawyer was not contacted. The anecdote makes no reference to a public record and appears to be a more of a recycling effort than original reporting.

Some of the people quoted in the story expressed a range of thoughts on how the accuracy of their depictions:

Sen. Toni Boucher

Sen. Toni Boucher confirmed that Mr. Jha contacted her to interview her about underage drinking and house parties in New Canaan. She did not read the story in the newspaper. She was directly quoted twice and said she had trouble with the specific language attributed to her in both lengthy direct quotes. "I think he got the gist of what I said, but he embellished. He put some things in language he would use," she said.

Her introduction as an opponent of substance abuse, while awkward, is accurate. Sen. Boucher has been an outspoken opponent of illegal drug use and recognizes the problem of underage drinking in the community.

The quote about house parties being “busted” is not her language, she said. [In Mr. Jha’s August 31, 2011 account of the house party, his lead says, “Police last week said they busted an underage drinking party ...”]

The quote “*When they embark in that direction they somehow think they are helping their kids be cool*” is problematic to Sen. Boucher. “This is not the way I would say it. The gist is right but the wording is not,” she said. The closing quote in the article has numerous embellishments, she said.

Robert Curry

Robert Curry is referred to in the story as the head of the Active Parenting Programs “here in New Canaan.” While Mr. Curry said it is technically accurate, further review suggests it is not. For this investigation, he identified himself as the head of the New Canaan Healthy Parents Program, which is not a formal organization, “just a group of parents who got together.” Active Parenting Programs is an Atlanta-based training program. Mr. Curry led the effort to hire a trainer and purchase materials from the program, which cost about \$27,000. He raised funds and got donations and ran programs for two years. Professionally, Mr. Curry is president of Turning Point for Leaders, a substance abuse consulting firm.

Barbara Greenberg, Ph.D.

Barbara Greenberg, a Ph.D. psychologist is introduced in a paragraph: “*Leading psychologists and psychiatrists like Dr. Barbara Greenberg agree with Appel.*” This paragraph is misleading because Dr. Greenberg is the only medical expert interviewed for the story. She is a bona fide expert in adolescent and teen addiction and has ties to the New Canaan area as a consultant at the New Canaan Silver Hill Teen Center. She has also co-written a best-selling book, *Teenage as a Second Language*. But none of these details are included in her introduction.

Furthermore, stylistically, the second references to her as Dr. Greenberg do not comport with AP style.

Dr. Sangeeta Appel

Dr. Sangeeta Appel, after having the quotes read to her, confirmed it sounded like what she said. The quotes sounded accurate to her. With the first quote in Permissive Parenting, she said, “I probably said something along those lines. Is it exact, I can’t recall.”

She had no problem with any of the quotes attributed to her. The mother of three, with twin sons who are now in high school, was identified in stories only as “New Canaan parent Sangeeta Appel.” When the story was published, her two sons were in eighth grade. She had also been involved in activities at the Outback Teen Center and the New Canaan library. She is also an optometrist. Furthermore, she had worked with Mr. Curry and been trained by the Active Parents group to run workshops on alcohol and substance abuse by teens.

These workshops were pretty prominent around New Canaan in 2010, which gave rise to much of the news coverage of the underage drinking controversy. Workshops were held at the teen center, the library, the Presbyterian Church and the high school. Dr. Appel said Mr. Jha did not attend any of her presentations. Three workshops were held in the fall of 2010 between October and December. After the presentations, she remembered Mr. Jha called her and, “asked how I felt about underage drinking.”

At the time of publication, she did not see the stories, but knew she was quoted. When she got around to reading them, she did not have any objections.

Frank McCoy

Frank McCoy, a Hartford lawyer was quoted in the story. He confirmed the interview but had little recollection of either the interview or the story. Overall, his inclusion in this story seems a bit random.

From a journalistic construction standpoint, the stories do a poor job of introducing speakers and explaining why they are being quoted or are integral to the story.

Dr. Appel's quotes are long and unwieldy. In Permissive Parenting, she is introduced right after the lead with a long quote and the simple attribution to her as "New Canaan parent." The stories make no effort to explain why she is involved in the story, no mention of her attending or holding the workshops. Also, it might have been relevant to explain that her twin sons were in eighth grade at the time. The parent of an eighth grader may have less to say about underage drinking and house parties than a parent of a high school student.

d. Secondary Sources

"Permissive Parenting" also makes use professional research on teenage alcohol use: The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's "Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol" and "Parenting Style, Religiosity, Peers, and Adolescent Heavy Drinking" a July 2010 article published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs.

The NIAAA materials are described in the news story as a "study." A review of this document, which was created by the group funded by the National Institutes of Health is a guide. The second paragraph in its introduction even states this: "This guide is geared to parents and guardians of young people ages 10 to 14." This document does not present any data and mostly

consists of lists and bullet points for parents. Mr. Jha's conclusion may be extrapolated from the talking points throughout the 10-page guide. But it is not a study.

The second study referenced in the story is indeed a study published by Stephen J. Bahr, Ph.D and John P. Hoffmann, Ph.D. from Brigham Young University. While this study exists, the conclusions summarized for this story do not in any way reflect the data or conclusions articulated in this study. The mere introduction of this study, which is more focused on religiosity than teen drinking, would also deserve some attention. As it reads, it is not entirely clear why this study is being incorporated into the story.

Above and beyond the vague reasons for incorporating this academic study, the reporter's summary bears no resemblance to the data or the study's conclusions. The term "permissive parenting" is not even an element to this study. The only reference to this term actually came in a citation to research the authors relied on for their study. The reporter's conclusion that the report "*implies permissive parenting is linked with other types of drug use and 'misbehavior,'*" is also specious. Using the verb "implies" helps masks conclusions that are not part of the study. Furthermore, he puts direct quotations around "misbehavior," a word that does not appear in this study.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Paresh Jha is not the first journalist who was discovered fabricating content presented as journalism. Unfortunately, he likely will not be the last. He is also not the first journalist to submit fictional accounts to an award competition and subsequently win a prestigious award.

Mr. Jha admitted his fabrications to his editors and ultimately in an interview for this investigation. Calling his actions “regrettable” and “misguided,” he offered to forfeit both his awards. “What I did was terrible. It was misguided and wrong and I had to own up to it and I lost my job because of it,” he said. “I totally understand the severity of the situation and I’m willing to forfeit the awards and do whatever is necessary to keep the integrity of the Connecticut SPJ intact,” he said in the interview.

In a letter to the CTSPJ, Mr. Jha apologized to the organization, his colleagues at the New Canaan News and readers: “When readers pick up a newspaper or click open an article online, they put their faith and trust into the writers that bring them the news. They expect and deserve the truth from journalists. I betrayed that trust with my actions and I am truly sorry.”

For their part, once the allegations arose regarding Mr. Jha, the Hearst editors acted quickly and responsibly in verifying his work, taking down his fictitious accounts from its news websites and terminating Mr. Jha. Hearst editors David McCumber and Ashley Varese also cooperated to the best of their ability with this investigation. However, Hearst editors fall short in even allowing anything bearing Mr. Jha’s byline to remain in the awards competition.

The award for the Underage Drinking series, which includes numerous quotes from two people who does not exist, should be retracted.

The award for the Twain story is a closer call. All the sources in the story indeed exist and they confirmed that they were interviewed. However, the names for two were misspelled,

three sources expressed concerns with how they were quoted, two sentences bear a similarity to a previously published news story and one referenced article cannot be located.

Given the problems with this story, the findings of Mr. Jha's admitted fabrications, and his own offer to forfeit his two awards, this award should also be retracted.

SPJ's Code of Ethics provides additional guidance for this decision. Although the code is not binding legal authority, it provides worthy aspirational goals for all journalists and reiterates journalistic standards for action on these two awards. The code states that journalists should "seek truth and report it," "minimize harm" and "be accountable."

Further, journalists should:

- "be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information."
- "test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error."
- "Deliberate distortion is never permissible."
- "Admit mistakes and correct them promptly."
- "Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media."
- "Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others."

The journalism for which Mr. Jha won these two awards fails to meet the standards set by the SPJ Code of Ethics. Furthermore, it is unfortunate these stories remained in the competition even after Mr. Jha's widespread fabrications came to light. Hearst Editors should have followed the model set by Ben Bradlee in the aftermath of the Janet Cooke fabrication scandal in 1980. In his memoir, *A Good Life*, Bradlee recounts how Cooke's feature on an 8-year-old heroin addict

who did not actually exist won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981. “It was after 2 a.m. when I was called with the news that I had known for hours was coming ... I woke Joe Pulitzer up in St. Louis to tell him we were returning the prize, with apologies.” (Bradlee, p. 445).

The integrity of the Post and the Pulitzer Prize was so important to Mr. Bradlee that it warranted a telephone call in the middle of the night. The Post returned the prize and licked its wounds. Similarly, Mr. Jha, himself, has offered to return the awards. In the absence of Hearst withdrawing anything bearing Mr. Jha’s byline or tagline, it is well within the bounds of a journalism society that values truth and honesty to strip Mr. Jha of his awards.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW LIST

The following people were contacted:

David McCumber, editor of Hearst Connecticut newspapers, brief interview on his cell phone, July 1, 2012, follow up emails, July 3, July 5, July 25.

Ashley Varese, editor, New Canaan News, email, July 6, 2012

Pareesh Jha, telephone interview, July 25, 2012, 3:30 p.m. and follow-up email.

Mark Twain Story

Kristen Brown, NCHS English teacher, telephone interview, July 2, 2012, 3 p.m.

Evan Remley, NCHS English teacher, interview on his cell phone, July 5, 2012, 4 p.m.

Howard Benedict, former long-time English teacher at New Canaan High School, telephone interview, July 5, 2012, at 1:45, p.m.

Mike McAteer, NCHS English teacher and student newspaper advisor, interviewed, July 3, 2012, 10 a.m.

Prof. GerShun Avilez, assistant professor of African American Studies at Yale University, telephone interview, July 10, 2012, 1:25 p.m.

Heidi D'Acosta, NCHS English teacher and English Department chair, telephone interview, July 17, 2012, 10:20 a.m.

Underage Drinking Story

Barbara Greenberg, Ph.D., telephone interview, July 12, 2012, 10 a.m.

Robert Curry, telephone interview, July 3, 2012, 1:45 p.m.

Dr. Sangeeta Appel, New Canaan parent, telephone interview, July 11, 2012, 11:48 a.m.

Sgt. Carol Ogrinc, New Canaan police department, youth division, telephone interview, July 9, 2012, 3:22 p.m.

Frank McCoy, Hartford attorney, telephone interview, July 9, 2012, 2:40 p.m.

Sen. Toni Boucher, telephone interview after emailing her sections of the story, July 13, 2012, 11:09 a.m.

APPENDIX B – ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About the Author

Roy S. Gutterman is an associate professor of communications law and journalism and director of the Tully Center for Free Speech at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

Gutterman teaches courses in communications and media law to undergraduate and masters students.

He is a graduate of the Newhouse School and Syracuse University's College of Law. He worked as a newspaper reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer and later clerked for a New Jersey Superior Court judge and practiced law in New Jersey.

In addition to speaking and writing about First Amendment law, he performs academic integrity and professional ethics workshops for Newhouse students and serves as a University Academic Integrity Representative, chairing academic integrity disciplinary hearings for university-wide panels. He is a long-time member of the Society of Professional Journalists and serves as the co-adviser to the Syracuse student chapter.

A complete CV can be furnished upon request. Rsgutter@syr.edu.

APPENDIX C – CORRESPONDENCE FROM PARESH JHA TO CTSPJ

 You replied to this message on 7/25/2012 4:33 PM.

From: Paresh Jha [redacted]
To: Roy S Gutterman
Cc:
Subject: Statement

Sent: Wed 7/25/2012 4:17 PM

Dear Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists,

I would like to start off by saying I am extremely sorry for my actions during my tenure at the New Canaan News where I fabricated sources and quotes for several stories. It was ill-conceived, misguided, foolish and wrong.

Let me be emphatically clear when I say it was all my own doing and not the result of any undue pressure from anywhere else. I apologize to all my colleagues at the New Canaan News and Hearst for these transgressions.

I also apologize to the Connecticut SPJ for misleading them in any way, shape or form. The third place award I received for the article "Tampering with Twain" all contained real quotes and sources. Every educator and source quoted in the article can be contacted and checked. The first place award I received for the package titled "Enabling underage drinking" contained two fabricated sources and quotes from those sources.

When readers pick up a newspaper or click open an article online, they put their faith and trust into the writers that bring them the news. They expect and deserve the truth from journalists. I betrayed that trust with my actions and I am truly sorry.

Sincerely,

Paresh Jha

You forwarded this message on 7/25/2012 4:43 PM.

To Manager

Forwards the selected e-mail to your manager.

Sent: Wed 7/25/2012 4:35 PM

From: Paresh Jha
To: Roy S Gutterman
Cc:
Subject: Re: Statement

Hi Roy,

That is correct. I am willing to do that.

-Paresh

On Wed, Jul 25, 2012 at 4:33 PM, Roy S Gutterman <rsgutter@syr.edu> wrote:

Dear Paresh,

Thanks for your time this afternoon and the statement. Let me just confirm one thing you said on the phone: you are willing to forfeit both awards, correct?

Thanks again,

Roy

Roy S. Gutterman

Associate Professor of Communications Law and Journalism

Director, Tully Center for Free Speech

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Syracuse University

215 University Plaza

APPENDIX D – RESPONSE FROM HEARST CONNECTICUT MEDIA GROUP TO CTSPJ

Hi Cindy and Jodie,

In response to your request:

- We can find no fault with “Teachers, students weigh in on Twain controversy.” We have confirmed all of the sourcing in this story.
- In regard to the In Depth Reporting entry, “Enabling Underage Partying,” we have determined that one of the three stories in that package, “the dangers of permissive parenting,” did contain fabricated quotes/sources, and as a result it has been removed from the News’ web site.

I hope this helps with your process.

Sincerely,

David

David McCumber

Editorial Director

Hearst Connecticut Media Group

Appendix E – New Canaan News story, June 22, 2012

New Canaan News

Thursday, July 26, 2012

85° Partly Cloudy
Weather | Contact Us

THE TOY CHEST
EDUCATIONAL TOYS & GAMES
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Stories contained fabricated material; reporter dismissed

Published 05:27 p.m., Friday, June 22, 2012

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Printable Version

A [New Canaan News](#) reporter has been dismissed after some of his stories were found to contain fabricated quotations and sources.

"We have found 25 stories written by [Paresh Jha](#) over the last year and a half that contain quotes from nonexistent sources," [David McCumber](#), editorial director of the [Hearst Connecticut Media Group](#), said Friday.

The problem was discovered when unusually spelled names were fact-checked by the editing staff. "When confronted, Jha admitted that he had fabricated the names and the quotes," McCumber said.

Every story Jha wrote during his 22-month tenure at the News is being checked for the validity of its sources, McCumber added.

The stories found to contain fabricated material have been removed from the newspaper's web site.

"We apologize to our readers," McCumber said. "A newspaper's credibility is its most important asset. This is a gross violation of our standards, and of the New Canaan News' well-earned reputation."

More Information

Fact box



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August 11th 12-4pm
Jeep MEET
20 Crescent St Stamford

Foods & Drinks
SALES

Most Read | Most Emailed

1. Bear sighting in New Canaan
2. Woman charged with felony after domestic dispute
3. New Canaan and Darien youth football players enjoy New York Giants camp
4. New Canaan falls to Newtown in wild two-day Cal Ripken clash, but earns rematch
5. New Canaan man charged with DUI
6. CMT scores in, New Canaan excels
7. New Canaan pension passed by Town Council

Things To Do

 [Dralion from Cirque du...](#)
Wednesday, Sep 5, 7:30 pm
Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum,
Hartford