

Elevated Influences: The Construction of Journalistic Identities at a City Magazine

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perspectives of local journalists through an ethnographic case study of D magazine in Dallas, Texas. The study assesses how staff members discursively construct journalistic identities within a geographically focused media organization, including the influences of their organizational roles, the company mission, and perceptions of their audience. The study also considers the relationship between journalistic identity and community identity by addressing how staff members describe their publication's role within Dallas.

KEYWORDS: media sociology, city magazines, case study, journalistic identity

Local journalists are not only responsible for providing news that is useful and relevant, but they must also develop a keen understanding of the people and communities they cover (Rivas-Rodriguez 2011). Local, or place-based, journalism can help community members negotiate shared meanings within their geographic spaces through the ways they define and contextualize news, which contributes to how communities function, how they are governed, and how they see themselves (Schmitz Weiss 2015).

Although much scholarship has considered journalism as a profession, examining the values different types of journalists hold can reveal an occupational ideology of journalism (Deuze 2005). An ideological approach also illuminates the various ways journalism professionals make their professional lives meaningful (Zelizer 1997). Journalistic ideology has been studied among newspaper (Gravengaard 2012; Hujanen 2009; Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008) and broadcast (Carpentier 2005) journalists, but examining journalistic identity within the context of magazine journalism can yield insights into how a less-studied group makes decisions and defines their journalistic roles.

Like their peers, magazine journalists operate within organizations focused on earning profits, which can limit their autonomous journalistic interpretations (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999). Journalists working at local magazines, in particular, may face enhanced demands to placate the interests of both advertisers and readers while also aiming to enhance their communities through their work (Jenkins 2016b). Therefore, news organizations can serve as resources for understanding journalistic identity (Reese 2001), including the role of power, decision-making, and change, as well as external factors, such as economic concerns, local power structures, and shifts in the journalistic field.

This study examines the perspectives and representational practices of local magazine journalists through an ethnographic case study of an award-winning city magazine, *D Magazine* in Dallas, Texas. The study considers how staff members discursively constructed their journalistic identity within a geographically focused media organization. The study also assesses the relationship between journalistic identity and extra-media influences by examining how staff members described their community and their publication's role within it.

Literature Review

Journalists have established a professional identity that shapes not only their day-to-day work but also their overall sense of what makes their work important. Professional identity has been defined as the attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences through which individuals define themselves in professional roles (Schein 1978). Individuals' professional identity is influenced by several factors, including processes of induction, training, and socialization (Kenny, Whittle, and Willmott 2011). Journalists' professional identity is affected by similar processes of professionalism, or stable knowledge about tasks that practitioners must master and that the public must accept (Soloski 1997).

A focus on journalists as professionals, however, may overlook the role of narratives and how journalists ascribe to themselves the power of interpretation (Zelizer 1997). Rather, journalistic identity uses a cultural lens to consider the "meanings, symbols, ideologies, rituals, and conventions by which journalists maintain their cultural authority" (Zelizer 2004, 101). An ideological understanding of journalism suggests that journalists share common values, strategies, and formal codes in their day-to-day practice, but they apply them differently when determining the meaning of their work and the context in which they do it (Deuze 2005).

These values do not remain static but are continuously contested in the pursuit of defining journalists' actions and aims (Ahva 2012). For example, Deuze (2005) identified ideal-typical values that characterize journalistic practice, particularly in western democracies. These include journalists providing a public service, objectivity (neutrality and fairness), autonomy (the ability to work independently), immediacy, and a sense of ethics. These ideal-types have been elements of journalistic ideology for decades but have become complicated by developments such as multimedia journalism and multiculturalism, which emphasize collaboration, inclusiveness, and even activism (Deuze 2005). Ultimately, understanding journalists' professional ideologies, or their sense of who they are and what they do, is key to interpreting their actions. Therefore, "Looking at professionalism as culture entails an insight into what things mean to journalists (culture is a system of meanings) and an understanding of how these meanings and actions are related (culture is a system of meaningful practices)" (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008, 665).

The individual journalist represents just one of multiple levels within a "hierarchy of influences" (Reese 2001; Shoemaker and Reese 1996) shaping how news is produced. As conceptualized by Reese (2001, 2016), the individual level considers journalists' background, training, and professional views, which influence their output and align them with or differentiate them from their audiences. A routines-level understanding considers work rules and procedures and how external forces, such as technology, time constraints, and organizational norms, shape these practices. Assessing the organizational level reveals the systems of power, such as owners, that shape policies, norms, and behaviors, as well as the motivations, often economic, driving them. Finally, for this study, the extra-media level is important, as it examines external institutions shaping content, such as advertisers, sources, and other media organizations.

These levels all influence occupational identities, including the ways journalists negotiate their editorial ideals within the commercial needs of their organization and owner and increased digital goals, as well as how their autonomy is shaped by relationships with their audience, sources, advertisers, and local power structures. As such, professionalism should be considered as the ways journalists define the rules and establish the boundaries of their work from external actors while assessing the political, economic (ownership, management), social (audiences), and cultural (community) contexts in which these discourses arise (Waisbord 2013).

This model allows researchers to address how a concept like journalistic identity is shaped at multiple levels, including the ways individual notions of identity interact with organizational directives, such as economic goals, and are expressed in routines, as well as external influences, such as sources, advertisers, and local power structures.

Local Journalists

Journalists working at the local level may embrace and execute professional norms in distinctive ways. The geographic areas where journalists do their work can be considered cultural sites where meanings are "constructed, shared, and reconstructed" (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999, 125). Because journalists function as part of geographically focused communities, they interpret local occurrences through shared social experiences and understood meanings (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999).

Membership in more than one interpretive community may also create contradictions, such as when journalists must balance a geographic loyalty with a dedication to professionalism (Zandberg and Neiger 2005). This tension can result in journalists privileging one identity over another to routinize events, thereby overriding their professional dedication to objectivity

(Zandberg and Neiger 2005). Journalists have also internalized a mythology suggesting that media, particularly newspapers, are “most true, pure, real, and authentic when they honor their responsibility to ‘the local’” (Pauly and Eckert, 2002, 310), and they value their personal connections to communities. This focus on locality does not just represent an editorial philosophy but also a marketing strategy in which “local” may mean whatever content interests readers (Pauly and Eckert 2002).

Journalists’ conceptions of readers, however, also often relies on “imagined community,” Anderson’s (1983) suggestion that the news media aim to inform or influence citizens while also reflecting media producers’ conceptualizations. Gans’ (1979) study of news organizations suggested that editors focus on assumptions about small, select groups of individuals, such as family members, friends, and journalistic colleagues, when making editorial decisions. Similarly, magazines construct meaning about the collective identity of audiences, including shared understandings of their values and ideals (Reader and Moist 2008; Webb 2006).

Local journalists may face organizational policies and practices that limit their autonomous decision-making as a result of profit-driven goals (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999), such as considering readers as consumers over citizens (Ruusunoska 2006). Journalists may also become increasingly concerned with “business thinking,” or the day-to-day financial successes of the publication, and increasingly cooperate with the business staff (Kunelius and Ruusunoska 2008). Additionally, journalistic interpretations of community occurrences could be beholden to the preferred meanings of dominant coalitions, as departing from these perspectives might pose economic threats to news organizations (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999). In undertaking public-journalism-focused projects, journalists may defer to local authorities to legitimize the topics or angles (Ruusunoska 2006), which could limit their editorial impact.

The role of ownership is also key, as the challenges facing local media in the U.S., including newspapers and magazines, have “been exacerbated by a commercial media model that prioritizes profit imperatives over other concerns” (Pickard and Stearns 2011, 47). This lack of commercial support for journalism as an institution of democracy suggests a market failure resulting from ownership concentration and profit maximization (Pickard 2014). A critical political economy approach considers the political and economic organization of media industries and their influence on how communications resources are distributed, including the roles of ownership, labor, managerial control, advertising, and sources, as well as the implications of these processes for media production, content, and consumption (Hardy 2014). CPE also examines the ways these priorities further the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

This study addresses journalistic identity as an ideological component of journalistic practice, one shaped both internally by the organization and externally by the surrounding community. Identity is also influenced by the shared meanings, often geographically determined, that influence how journalists interact with sources and consider their readers.

The Role of City Magazines

Geographically focused magazines have been present in the United States since the 1700s (Riley and Selnow 1989). *San Diego* magazine launched in 1948 and sought to serve as an alternative to other local media (Tebbel 1969), a justification cited by several city-magazine founders (Fletcher and Vandenberg 1982). Scholars have recognized the potential for city magazines to maintain a city’s image, boost “civic morale,” offer depth and perspective on urban crises, and appeal to influential citizens (Burd 1969, 319). City magazines have also been

marketed as “‘urban survival manuals’ for the relatively affluent — guides to the best shopping, the best dining, the best entertainment that a city had to offer” (Riley and Selnow 1989, 3). As a result, they have increasingly focused on branding cities to reach middle- and upper-class “consumers” (Greenberg 2000).

Today, city magazines are present in 66 markets and have a combined 3.5 million circulation (City and Regional Magazine Association 2017). They also continue to attract affluent, involved, and educated readers (City and Regional Magazine Association 2017). Many of these publications have, as a result, constructed idealized versions of cities emphasizing consumption and class-based assumptions about what is good and desirable about a city (Jenkins, 2016a). This is despite the fact that city magazine editors have suggested a desire for their publications to fulfill distinctive functions among other local media, including serving as user manuals, providing instructions for understanding and experiencing cities, and offering in-depth packages on topics and distinctive visual and textual presentations (Sivek 2014). City magazine editors also value deeply reported and investigative articles as well as opinion and commentary that can galvanize readers (Jenkins, 2016b).

This study builds on this literature through addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: What organizational practices shape staff members’ professional identities?

RQ2: How do personal journalistic values shape staff members’ professional identities?

RQ3: How do notions of the audience shape professional identities?

Method

This research uses an ethnographic case study to assess journalistic identity among staff members at *D Magazine* in Dallas, Texas. The value of case study lies in its ability to address a particular case at a particular point in time for a specific purpose while also considering the real-world context in which it unfolds (Creswell 2012). The researcher considers the particularities of a case, such as what the case is, what it does, what individuals and behaviors fall within its parameters, and how it relates to similar cases (Stake 1995). Understanding a case’s context also requires evaluation and description of the distinctive environment in which discourses, ideologies, behaviors, processes, and other activities arise (Cassel and Symons 2004).

A qualitative approach uses multiple methods to develop a deep, holistic, and naturalistic account of a case (Gerring 2007). Qualitative case studies emphasize high internal validity, or findings that clearly and adequately emulate the meanings and understandings of participants, and in-depth analysis, such as triangulation of methods, theories, and data (Gerring 2007). Case study research focused on organizations can be particularly fruitful in that researchers can interview leaders and members, observe processes and activities, study documents, and provide descriptions of structures and layouts (Cassel and Symons 2004).

Site Description

D Magazine was launched in 1974 by Wick Allison and Jim Atkinson (D Magazine 2018a). *D* was founded to serve as a strong, independent city magazine with a focus on making an impact while serving readers’ interests (D Magazine 2018a). The founders also aimed to offer a venue for luxury advertisers to reach an upscale audience (Allison 1984). Today, *D magazine* has a circulation of 60,971 and a total readership of 551,535 (D Magazine 2018b). The

magazine's average reader age is 49 and median age is 45, with an average household income of \$331,200 (D Magazine 2018b).

The D company also publishes *D Home*, a shelter publication focused on subjects such as decorating, gardening, cooking, and health; *D CEO*, a magazine focused on local business and businesspeople; *D Weddings* magazine; the D Medical Directory; and the D Design Book. The company owns People Newspapers, publishers of *Preston Hollow People* and *Park Cities People*, monthly local newspapers focused on two Dallas neighborhoods. Lastly, D maintains DMagazine.com, a website with articles on restaurants, entertainment, fashion, health, business, travel, weddings, and other topics.

D also sponsors a community-development organization: Coalition for a New Dallas aims to "restore and reconnect" neighborhoods affected by elevated highways (Coalition for a New Dallas 2018). The coalition educates residents about Dallas' declining urban core and promotes opportunities to remove and reroute the highways in question. It also includes a political action committee designed to build awareness about community needs.

Procedure

Data for this study consisted of participant observation at D; in-depth interviews; and analyses of documents, including magazine issues, media kits, DMagazine.com, company emails, meeting agendas, editorial calendars, and readership reports. I gathered data at D from July 6 to July 31, 2015, totaling 20 days and 142.5 hours in the field. I conducted 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of D's management and editorial staffs. Interviews addressed staff members' duties, perceptions of the workplace environment and culture, views of D publications' content, perceptions of D's readers, conceptions of D's function in the community, and comparisons between D publications and other local media. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and one hour. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 449.5 single-spaced pages of notes.

I also observed general company operations as well as attended weekly editorial meetings for *D Magazine*, *D CEO*, *D Weddings/D Home*, and DMagazine.com; weekly Monday morning staff meetings; advertising staff meetings; online production meetings; project meetings; and special company events. These observations resulted in 184.5 single-spaced pages of field notes. The analysis for this study, which is part of a larger project, relies primarily on the interview data.

Data Analysis

I began with a preliminary soak of the data, during which I reviewed the field notes, interview transcripts, and organizational artifacts line by line and used memoing to record my observations, initial linkages, and redundancies. Next, I engaged in open coding of the data to identify first-order constructs as reflected through "open codes" and index words (Stewart 1998) as well as *in vivo* terms supplied by participants (Swanborn 2010). Lastly, I engaged in recontextualization, or refocusing, prioritizing, and clustering first-order codes into second-order indexing or inclusive themes (Stewart 1998).

Findings

This analysis revealed several means through which D staff members constructed their

personal identity as well as how these identities corresponded with the ways they talked about and interacted within their organization and how they discussed their community and their roles within it. These approaches to identity negotiation included the ways staff members described their roles, how they identified with D's mission, how they chose content for D publications, and how they characterized D's readers.

RQ1: Organizational Practices

Staff members at D described many duties typical of magazines and other news organizations, including executing content, engaging with readers, and coordinating with staff members in other departments. They also contributed to more wide-reaching tasks and functions, including cultivating audiences online, developing new products, representing the company in the community, and becoming involved in community initiatives. Therefore, D provided a setting for the emergence of new organizational roles through which staff members could complete traditional journalistic tasks while contributing to the company's overall mission. These findings elucidate the influence of the routine and organizational levels on journalistic identity.

Describing Organizational Roles

Editors emphasized the traditional journalistic aspects of their daily work, such as planning and editing content and working with writers. However, they also completed company-required tasks that blurred the lines between editorial and marketing functions, such as engaging with staff members in non-editorial departments; attending dinners, fundraisers, and parties; and appearing at business and networking events. A *D CEO* editor said he reviewed every story in the magazine, editing the larger features, as well as functioning as a "liaison with the community in doing, you know, moderated panels and whatever — representing the magazine." Another *D CEO* editor said she fulfills "a very traditional editorial role but also product development. We do a lot more than most editors typically do in terms of keeping an eye on sales and everything else. But it never infiltrates our coverage." This comment suggests that editors not only blended blend journalistic and marketing-oriented roles, but they also drew a discursive line between these duties to maintain the integrity of editorial content. An editor with *D Home* and *D Weddings* said she was hired partly because she had experience attending events on behalf of a magazine and could serve as a "head cheerleader" for D: "A lot of times that's when you are getting your best leads; it's not something at the desk, you know, for stuff to trickle in. It's being out there, and you hear something, and you are like, oh my god, that would be a great story to incorporate." In this, the editor suggested that she not only served a promotional function for her publications, but being present in the community allowed her to seek out timely news items.

Staff members described other ways their roles had changed in response to shifts not only within D but also in the magazine field. The incorporation of D's digital products into the print operation posed some challenges for staff members who had previously worked on legacy media products. An editor at *D Magazine* said she initially focused on developing and writing coverage only for the print magazine, but she must now continually update website listings and produce content for a blog in her coverage area, requiring her to balance the long-term focus of a monthly publication with the immediate emphasis of a digital product. She said she feels like she has two jobs, which is "kind of crazy-making." A D manager, who initially focused on branded print

content, has shifted to “digital audiences” and maintaining databases of information about those who have interacted with the D “brand.” She said, “I oversee the print stuff, but I have moved my day-to-day stuff; it’s now more focused on the digital.” This response reinforces how staff members internalized a “digital-first” mentality when considering not only D’s content but also its audiences, who might interact with D through its website, publications, social media, events, or other venues.

An online editor said readers interact with content via multiple digital platforms, rather than reading the same printed publication, so staff members must think like online writers and editors. He said the “business is changing” because “You have to think about marketing your own stuff and pushing your own stuff out. I mean, we do it — it’s kind of a burden, right, because it’s like, look, I want to tell my stories and write my way, so I have to be the one to tell people.” Similarly, a *D* photographer said editors must now remain at their desks, working on the print issue as well as writing online content. Rather, “I am out there in the community meeting people, talking to store owners and politicians [...] They open up a little bit more, so that’s really interesting.” This staff member suggested that because she has the flexibility to leave the office, she has more access to sources as well as story ideas that she shares with her colleagues.

D’s leaders also developed new organizational roles to reflect changing understandings of how news organizations should innovate. These shifts were particularly evident among the management team, or *D Magazine Partners*, which included the chairman/publisher, president, chief financial officer, digital director, marketing director, production director, and audience development director. The digital director position initially focused on art, technology and sales related to digital products and overseeing the web designers and working alongside the online editor, but it evolved to address how to monetize digital content and products. The brand manager, part of the business team, oversaw D’s social media strategy, as well as produced a monthly newsletter and coordinated media sponsorships and event promotion. This position demonstrated the blending that occurs with “editorial-based products,” which emphasize a particular content topic but ultimately serve to enhance the brand.

Identifying With D’s Mission

D’s mission was “Making Dallas even better,” which staff members discussed as part of their understanding of the local function of the company and their organizational roles. For some, the mission manifested in *D Magazine*’s approaches to editorial decision-making; for others, it represented a more general understanding of how *D* covers issues and the company’s reputation in the community; and for still others, it offered a frame for considering how the company positively influences the city. Staff members also discussed their contributions to achieving the mission, although some expressed a more direct ability to initiate change than others.

Some staff members attributed D’s mission and how they interpreted it to company leadership, indicating less a personal interest in fulfilling this goal and more a desire to reinforce leaders’ aims. Multiple staff members praised the fact that D stakes an ideological claim on issues in a way other local news organizations may not be able to willing to do. D leaders reinforced this focus even during orientation sessions for new staff members. On his first day at D, a management team member said that the publisher emphasized D as: “a media of opinion — educated opinion, good-meaning opinion, well-informed opinion but opinion nonetheless — and to hear him say that right off the bat was unencumbering and enlightening. And I think that kind of sets the tone for a lot of what we do here.” A D leader said addressing controversial topics is

“in our DNA.” Therefore, not only does the company take controversial stances on topics, but staff members must also identify by this mantra and be willing to share their opinions both internally and publicly. A management team member called the mission a “unifying tie” allowing staff members, who live in different parts of the city and have different interests, to contribute to Dallas’ overall health. This staff member suggested that his co-workers share a desire to improve the city; however, doing so means identifying with a manager-created understanding of how community development should occur. One *D* editor said he had never strongly disagreed with the publisher’s views, so he had not had to threaten to “quit in protest” in response to a particular incident or issue. Although joking, this staff member suggested that company-level ties to particular causes could present challenges to staff members’ organizational performances and autonomy.

Staff members suggested that *D* could improve the city through presenting stories and perspectives that enlighten readers about important topics. A *D Magazine* editor said that although some stories have drawn controversy, “We just really seem to tell the best stories possible. [...] We also think that there’s a certain element in what we do of helping people see things differently and hear about things that they may not otherwise hear about.” Another *D* editor said the magazine’s approach to journalism aims to “inform and enlighten the city of Dallas.” This staff member said, “Our mission is not to be newspaper-y, to concentrate on — even if a story happens in Dallas and we can’t just write on it, we wait four to six months and we do a background story [...] that actually can tell the story.” This staff member suggested that *D Magazine* could present a more comprehensive perspective and context that other local news organizations do not offer.

Not all *D* staff members saw their publications’ role the same way. For example, an editor at *D CEO* said his magazine addresses Dallas “through the chief executive, through their stories, because they are the ones that founded the companies and have the visions.” For this editor, “making Dallas even better” involves covering local businesses through the perspectives and experiences of corporate leadership and taking a “pro-business” stance. In fact, he said that despite his awareness that some business practices are controversial, his publication focuses on “supporting business rather than tearing it down.” The success of the community, then, is tied to the prosperity of local businesses.

An editor with People Newspapers called his publications the “truth teller” but also said “our news is very soft,” such as recognizing unsung heroes in the community and taking a humorous approach to crime coverage. An editor with *D Home* said her magazine does not fulfill the mission in the same way as *D Magazine* “just because we’re just looking at pretty things.” Rather, making Dallas even better came through partnering with local nonprofit organizations for events and highlighting “up and coming artisans” and other local sources. These responses indicate that some publications improve the city through promoting people and causes, although they may shy away from taking stances that could offend readers.

D’s internal organizations were also cited as examples of ways the company influences the city, particularly Coalition for a New Dallas. Although only a few staff members contributed directly to the efforts of the coalition, its presence and influence could be felt throughout the organization. One staff member said, “I’m not involved in that part of *D* at this time, but I know it’s something that we’re all invited to get involved with, so that’s pretty neat.” This staff member, and others, suggested that although they were not required to get involved with the coalition, supporting the cause reflects company culture. A *DMagazine.com* editor said: “As a hardened old newspaper journalist ... I did and everyone else did have some concerns about how

the coalition thing is going to affect our editorial autonomy or whatever, but it was not a problem at all.” However, a *D Magazine* editor said, “We were just hoping we weren’t going to get swept up in that because it’s, like, none of us have a time to — we’re always at our desk.” This comment suggested that staff members, particularly editors, may have faced tensions in balancing the company’s political involvement with their need to remain objective. Even so, a management team member said she enjoyed working in a company with clear goals: “I love that I have a boss who is, like, we are going to tear down the highway, and there is no doubt that it will happen.” This response suggested a desire to reflect the goals of D’s leaders and support their strategies for making an impact on the city.

RQ2: Personal Journalistic Values

Staff members’ sense of journalistic identity was also evident in discussions of D content, particularly in how they identified a “D story.” That is, they emphasized the topics, story approaches, and reader impact that should be associated with any story appearing in a D publication. Editors also often relied on their personal interests, preferences, expertise, and networks of contacts and sources when defining quality content, which affected story selection and reporting approaches. Lastly, staff members addressed their favorite types of stories to write and the stories that were most significant to them. These considerations reflected the ways individual journalistic priorities, such as compelling writing, engaging topics, and social impact, interacted with organizational priorities, such as reader service, in some cases revealing the influence of commercial priorities.

Overall, editors described a need to ensure that publications included a mix of content that pleased readers, reflected their publication’s voice and focus, and met editor’s journalistic standards. *D Magazine* focused on balancing private-service content, such as lifestyle, entertainment, and dining coverage, with public-service content, or more hard-hitting topics, such as crime, education, or politics. A *D Magazine* editor associated the latter category with “good reads” and “journalism covers,” noting that D tends to publish more of these covers than other city magazines. The following interaction occurred during a D editorial meeting:

Overall, looking at the number of journalism covers, he [the editor] said, “That doesn’t make me happy,” as there was only one hard-core journalism cover, “and that’s not enough.” [...] He did mention, however, that the magazine would soon be doing “race in the ’burbs.” And the staff writer mentioned the Kidd Kraddick cover, which the editor described to the art director, who was new to Dallas. He said, “That sold really well for us.”

This discussion suggested that although the editor prioritized public-service cover features, he recognized the need to produce covers that drew large audiences. *D CEO* editors included a variety of content in their magazine as well, including an “up-front section” of short news pieces, longer features, columns about different industries (real estate, health care, and others), and a “personal luxury” section. A *D CEO* editor said the latter section was incorporated to “not only bring in more advertising but also to recognize that these readers are, even more than *D Magazine*, are more affluent [...]. And they are really, you know, they’re driving nice cars [...] they take vacations that are, you know, to France or whatever, as opposed to going to the Grand Canyon.” For *D CEO*, achieving a mix of content not only reflected editors’ focus on presenting

a wide range of topics but also ensuring that content matched the lifestyles and interests of readers, which could be limiting.

Staff members balanced corporate considerations of newsworthiness with their personal understandings of what content should appear in publications. In some cases, these understandings mirrored company expectations for content, while in others, staff members expressed personal goals for what stories they saw as important and influential. These negotiations were particularly evident when staff members discussed private-service content. One *D Magazine* writer said he enjoyed writing the features accompanying the Best Doctors listing, which allowed him to investigate specific doctors or medical trends. He mentioned a feature focused on two doctors who treated a 6-year-old girl having nonstop heart attacks. For this writer, finding ways to bring an intriguing angle or story to standard service content enhanced his reporting experience. Staff members with *D Home* and *D Weddings* also described ways to humanize service-oriented articles. One editor said of features about particular homes, “Even when I do the home features, which is about the home and about the look and the interior, I tend to write about the family that lives there, like, how do you live in it? Why did you design it this way?” A *DMagazine.com* staff member cited a blog focused on local home listings:

I like any time I can speak to a designer or artist. It usually takes me longer to do this because I’m more sensitive about it because I know they’re really going to be reading it. Those are definitely more fulfilling because it makes them so happy. [...] Every now and then it’s nice to do something that you feel is really benefiting somebody.

A *DMagazine.com* staff member, who previously worked at a local newspaper, said his favorite stories focus on music, and writing a blog, he can take a more opinionated, informal approach than the newspaper allowed. These comments suggest that although some staff members focused on particular tasks or content in their day-to-day work, they enjoyed writing stories reflecting their interests or that they perceived positively influenced the community. A *D Magazine* staff writer said that ultimately, when determining which features to pursue for the magazine, he focused on identifying a good “character”:

Generally, a character or two that some — that the readers really care about, and most of the readers are you know, suburban types, whether they live in the suburbs or not, and so that’s going to be either a celebrity or somebody who is in the news or somebody who’s been through something really interesting.

Although the writer kept his audience — “suburban types” — in his mind, he also focused on identifying narratives he found interesting and that could be compelling for readers.

RQ3: Considering the D Audience

The ways staff members discussed *D*’s audience also shaped how they attributed meaning to their work. Both those serving in editorial and management roles referenced “readers” as a general concept, rather than particular groups or individuals. Staff members working for the various *D* publications also focused on their specific audiences and how their understandings of what those audience members need and want shape their content decisions. Occasionally, staff members referenced interactions with readers and how they responded to stories. These

responses revealed the role of extra-media influences on the journalists' work, including readers, sources, advertisers, and the broader community.

Staff members described D's audience in terms of the company and its brand as a whole as well as their particular publications and the audiences and communities they cover. These characterizations also allowed staff members to differentiate D's readers from those of other publications in Dallas. For example, an editor with *D Magazine* compared his publication's audience to readers of *Vanity Fair* or *The New Yorker*: "We have a sophisticated, very educated audience — 99% of them have a college degree, so we are not writing to the *Observer's* audience." This comment suggested that *D* reaches a different readership from the *Dallas Observer*, the city's alternative newsweekly, while also suggesting that D's readers were more refined and required higher-quality content. Similarly, a staff photographer said "there is a real strong readership among the older Dallas-ites," suggesting that D's audience encapsulates the city's long-standing, influential residents. A *D Magazine* editor said:

We think of our folks as affluent, engaged folks who have lived in Dallas for a while. So, yeah, I mean, if you are going to find a crime story, we are not going to do a crime story just about some drug dealer who shot somebody. It has to be a little — it's got to be elevated. If you have got a jewel heist, OK, now we are talking.

This comment reinforced the way conceptions of audience influence news values at D's publications in that a crime story about "some drug dealer" might be considered newsworthy at the local newspaper, but because *D Magazine* serves an upscale audience, the crime must affect or be of interest to Dallas' affluent, elite citizens — in his words, "elevated."

An editor with *D Home* and *D Weddings* said these magazines' audiences differ in print and online, with the print audience encompassing affluent Dallas residents who "live in these homes, live in the homes that we feature," while the online audience includes "people like me who think those houses are really cool." This editor suggested that the print audience is more affluent and established than blog readers, who may be upwardly mobile and see the content as aspirational and with whom she more closely identifies. *D CEO* focuses on reaching local business executives, which an editor with that publication joking called "old white guys." This editor, however, also said he would like to broaden that audience and has incorporated stories focused on younger entrepreneurs, start-up businesses, and more ethnically diverse executives. He said, "We've found that older executives like reading about younger executives, too, the start-ups, the people who are coming in and shaking up what they know as the status quo." This comment suggests that extending *D CEO's* audience will result in a more balanced portrayal of Dallas' business community while also benefiting the publication by attracting more readers.

Staff members also frequently invoked the interests of readers when discussing the perceived influence and success of content. An editor at *D Home* and *D Weddings* said she values content that "people can actually take and use," such as a spring cleaning guide, a guide to white paints, and a feature on which bouquet lasted the longest. This editor said:

I feel like we get a lot of feedback from readers on that kind of thing because it's useful information. I mean it's all great to look at beautiful homes, and I think everyone enjoys that. But that's where you can really take it a step further when you can find a way to help and apply it to their daily lives.

This editor suggested that although features on homes are expected in *D Home*, they truly serve their readers when they offer content that can help them navigate their daily life. Online staff members frequently evaluated the success of content based on how many readers had read or shared it. A DMagazine.com editor said, “What I think about it is kind of irrelevant once it’s out there. I would more so judge its success on the response it gets, even if it’s a bad response, as long as people took the time to engage with it.” They also suggested that they adjusted content and brainstormed new ideas based on readers’ responses to it.

Staff members also discussed the challenge of balancing their daily workload with engaging with readers. A management team member focused on maintaining and extending the D brand said, “It’s definitely one of those things where if time allowed it, I would probably comment more and engage more, but most of the time I can only spend so much time on Facebook before I have to move on to one of my other projects.” A *D Magazine* editor said that although he has a Facebook account and recognizes the need to engage via that platform: “Twitter is more my jam. It’s easier for me to dive in. The reason I don’t spend much time on Facebook is there is too much shit going on. I mean, there is really too much. [...] I am not going to go over there and get involved in a conversation most times.” Although these staff members encouraged reader engagement by sharing D’s content, they limited their responses based on whether they saw the conversation as legitimate and fruitful.

Discussion

This study considered how staff members at D balanced their individual journalistic identities with organizationally constructed understandings. These negotiations were evident in staff members’ routines, as well as how they discussed their organizational roles and functions, journalistic values and how they compared to the values of the organization, approaches to news selection, content they found meaningful, and how they described the surrounding community and readers’ responses to their work. Staff members’ identity narratives revealed how they reconciled the economic, technological, and social challenges of working within a local news organization with their understandings of “real” journalists and “real” journalism (Deuze 2005, 444). This study, therefore, highlighted how journalists employ their power of interpretation (Zelizer 1997) and the internalized meanings, symbols, ideologies, and conventions through which they reinforced their “cultural authority” (Zelizer 2004, 101).

D staff members, at times, defined themselves based on organizational membership, such as through their roles and routines, the ways they interpreted and enacted the organization’s mission (“Making Dallas even better”), and how they differentiated D from other local media. In other cases, however, staff members described individual journalistic values, which were influenced by personal understandings of what made their work valuable while reflecting D’s goals and reputation, suggesting that they negotiated multiple identities. These perspectives were evident in the ways staff members discussed the D content they found meaningful as well as significant interactions with readers.

For example, when discussing content, staff members described a desire to mix stories that provided a public service, such as lists of best doctors or restaurants, with more “journalistic” content, such as crime features, investigations into city problems, or compelling personality profiles. These perceptions of “hard news” versus “soft news” content, which staff members also described in terms of “good reads” and articles with universal themes and strong narratives, suggested a reliance on “codes of knowledge” for newsworthiness and news writing

(Zelizer 1997). However, staff members also blended an emphasis on public-service journalism with “private service” journalism (Jenkins 2016b), demonstrating how editors might negotiate the tension associated with balancing fulfilling both journalistic and market goals. This emphasis on providing “good reads” and “journalism covers” served as typifications (Tuchman 1973), or routines through which editors negotiated everyday decision-making and problem-solving. These negotiations revealed that individual journalists, motivated by their professional background, training, and understandings of their company roles, were also influenced by managerial directives to present stories that would draw readers and advertisers, in turn shaping the procedures through which they chose the mix of sources, topics, and approaches in the magazines (Reese 2001, 2016; Waisbord 2013).

The self-inflicted focus on providing expertise on all of these topics represented a city-magazine mentality in which staff members suggested that providing service content was something city magazines do, although they were not formally obligated to do so by an external entity nor did they acknowledge the need to provide this content because of direct competition from other local media organizations. This mentality was also evident in staff members’ desire for an “elevated” feel in stories and presentation, or ensuring that the magazine offered thoughtful features as well as design and photography appealing to affluent readers. For example, staff members focused on elevating service content through combining list-type information with an in-depth feature and attention-grabbing presentation. The use of “elevated” served as a metaphor allowing editors to justify choices about content while reflecting a consumerist emphasis on reaching the right readers. These considerations also reflect the increased need for local journalists to consider “business thinking,” including a perceived audience demand for useful and experience-driven journalism (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008).

Therefore, the city-magazine mentality functions as a legitimizing discourse allowing staff members to reinforce the company’s ability to provide thoughtful and deeply reported content alongside service-oriented content while also reflecting D’s authoritative role in the community through suggesting how readers live their daily lives. These negotiations also emphasize the influence of publishers, advertisers, and other local media – extra-media influences – on journalists’ autonomy to publish the content they view as fulfilling journalism’s public service role.

The editors and writers working for D’s niche publications (*D Home*, *D Weddings*, *D CEO*, and *People Newspapers*) and blogs emphasized other types of ideal content, such as opportunities to recognize people doing good works or articles that provided tips, lists, or insights that improved people’s lives. These editors demonstrated perspectives on news content, driven by personal ideals, organizational needs, and considering readers as consumers, that allowed them to develop their own self-understanding for how news should be produced (Ruusunoksa 2006). For example, staff members associated with *D Home* and *D Weddings* said they focused on highlighting people, homes, products, and other “pretty things,” while *D CEO* editors said they contributed to the company’s editorial mission through highlighting the efforts of Dallas’ local business leaders and taking a pro-business stance, which could enhance the city’s financial viability. These journalists shared common values, strategies, and formal codes in their daily work but also applied them differently when assessing the meaning of their work (Deuze 2005), demonstrating the ways individual, organizational, and extra-media levels interact to influence routine decisions about content and how different journalistic identities emerge.

Staff members’ sense of professional worth was also connected to how they regarded D’s audience. These considerations, however, largely depended on an imagined understanding of D’s

readers. That is, staff members often relied upon an imagined community (Anderson 1983) based on individual and corporate-driven conceptualizations rather than geographic qualities. For example, *D Magazine* editors compared their readers to those of upscale national magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and suggested that they did not hold the same responsibility to appeal to a wide audience as other local media. Staff members also said that balancing their day-to-day duties with engaging with readers, whether in person or online, could be difficult, and they did not always value readers' contributions or opinions. Therefore, although staff members often referred to readers' needs, interests, and levels of engagement when making decisions about topics and approaches, they also relied on assumptions about readers' collective identity, including shared values, ideals, and interests (Reader and Moist 2008; Webb 2006) related to how to spend their time and money in the community and what causes to care about.

D editors and writers aimed to reach a general audience with compelling content but also emphasized preferences for some topics over others based on audience demographics — such as a writer suggesting he would prioritize a crime story on a jewel heist over a neighborhood shooting because *D*'s audience would be more interested in the former focus. Ultimately, because readers of *D* — and city magazines generally — are typically affluent and influential, editors and writers target their story selection and reporting approaches to this audience, potentially neglecting the needs and representations of the broader community. Editors with People Newspapers suggested a closer relationship with their readers, which manifested in editorial decisions keenly focused on what readers are interested in, particularly “soft news” stories that advocate for the community and its members. This focus may reflect the fact that the neighborhoods these newspapers cover are largely homogenous, resulting in preferred meanings that are narrowly defined and a smaller economic base (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999).

Efforts to balance these influences reflected the contradictions associated with membership in more than one interpretive community. Specifically, staff members balanced their geographic loyalty with a dedication to professionalism (Zandberg and Neiger 2005), thereby determining when to privilege one identity over another, as well as the needs of the company. These negotiations were evident in how staff members discussed *D*'s mission. The emphasis on “making Dallas even better” manifested in content, organizational culture, professional ideals, and community involvement. For some staff members, the mission shaped editorial decisions, as *D* publications could improve the city through addressing and staking claims on certain issues, particularly *D Magazine*. Other staff members, such as those affiliated with *D CEO* and *D Home*, cited the ways *D Magazine* contributed to the company mission but downgraded their own contributions because they do not emphasize the same politically charged topics. However, these editors also suggested that they supported *D*'s community-development efforts, such as Coalition for a New Dallas, demonstrating that both organizational identification and geographic identification shaped their professional legitimacy (Zelizer 1997).

Although involvement in these community-development efforts could jeopardize staff members' editorial autonomy, in that they had covered the initiatives on several occasions, they praised *D*'s leadership in participating in improving Dallas and suggested that loyalty to the company's mission meant supporting these aims, including tearing down a highway that ran through downtown. Therefore, in order to maintain their “cultural authority” (Zelizer 2004, 101) as journalists and agenda-setters in Dallas, *D* staff members openly negotiated their understandings of proper journalistic practice, with some suggesting the need to maintain a boundary between editorial practices and the coalition while also praising the opportunity to become involved with a direct effort to positively affect the city.

These forces were also evident in staff members' emphasis on extending the D "brand" and how that emphasis shaped their daily work, such as through making public appearances, cultivating a social media presence, and creating content that met D's editorial standards while also attracting readers. This negotiation demonstrates the need to consider changes to the ideology of journalists (Deuze 2005), particularly at the local level, including challenges to autonomy, objectivity, and public service resulting from market forces.

The study focused on a single case in the U.S. context, and although D's practices may serve as models for other city and regional magazines in the U.S., these findings cannot be generalized to all local media or geographically based magazines. This study, however, demonstrated how extra-media factors, such as other local media organizations, the interests of elite citizens, and advertisers and owners, can influence organizational goals for U.S. local media (Hardy 2014). These aims, evident in the company mission statement, were internalized by the local journalists, who catered their routines to meeting corporate needs while integrating them into their personal sense of what constitutes quality journalism. The public-service impact of this organization, evident in its perceived ability to improve readers' everyday lives and enhance the city, further reinforced the benefits of marrying individual and organizational identities.

Through understanding how local magazine journalists make decisions about content, the organizational cultures in which they do so, and the broader significance they associate with their work, researchers can assess the potential for these publications to investigate pressing problems in their communities and identify how readers might respond.

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