Journalism in Transition
The Professional Identity of Swedish Journalists

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av
filosofie doktorsexamen i journalistik och masskommunikation,
som med tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten
vid Göteborgs universitet framläggs för offentlig granskning,
fredagen den 5 mars 2010 klockan 13.15 i Annedalsseminariet, sal 302.
Institutionen för Journalistik, Medier och Kommunikation, (JMG)
Seminariegatan 1A, Göteborg
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Doctoral dissertation presented at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication,  
University of Gothenburg, PO Box 710, SE-405 30 Gothenburg. English text and summary in  
Swedish, 248 pages. ISBN: 978-88212-80-1   ISSN: 1101-4652

Abstract  
Is journalism going through ‘de-professionalization’ or is it just entering a new phase – taking a  
different shape? And what is the meaning of professional ideals such as scrutiny and autonomy  
in these processes?  

In my thesis, “Journalism in Transition”, I discuss these matters, focusing on the case of  
Swedish journalists. Empirical support is drawn from a national survey conducted five times  
since 1989 on the Dept. of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University Gothenburg  
(JMG). Questions about journalists’ perceptions of various ideals offer excellent opportunities to  
explore possible homogenization vs. fragmentation, and what the attitudinal dimensions actually say about the professional content of Swedish journalism.  
The results are analyzed by the conceptualization of Bourdieu’s field theory, along with  
current professional theory, and point at a possible separation of professional levels where a few  
ideals constitute an over-arching professional identity, while the flora of attitudes below is more  
diverse and dependent on factors of organizational affiliation, gender and age. Professional  
ideals may furthermore be regarded as a form of symbolic capital, used as legitimizing tools in  
journalism’s struggle for maintaining status quo.  

A main conclusion is that journalism is not de-professionalizing on ideological level, but  
going through a re-formation. Traditional journalistic ideals have attained increasing support  
over time and the efforts to fix professional boundaries are fierce. These boundaries are,  
however, subjects of negotiation: In the professional identity formation of Swedish journalists  
between 1989-2005 I also detect and increasing orientation towards liberal- and market values,  
which I interpret as the incorporation of organizational values into the professional identity –  
thereby legitimizing those.  

A second conclusion is that social attributes such as gender, age and formal qualifications  
mean less to the professional identity formation in 2005 than they did in 1989. The reason for  
this is the increasing homogenization of journalistic ideals – all journalists think increasingly  
alike, no matter social background. Factors still being highly relevant, though, are gender,  
journalistic training and place of work. Those factors determine journalists’ positions in the field  
and consequently form their professional identities into various shapes.

Keywords: Journalism, professionalism, professional identity, fragmentation, homogenization,  
Bourdieu, professional discourse, journalistic field, gender identity, organizational identity,  
managerial discourse