

Journalism in Transition

The Professional Identity of Swedish Journalists

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The Professional Identity of Swedish Journalists

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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