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THE ROOTS OF JOURNALISTIC PERCEPTION

A Bourdieusian Approach to Media and Class

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Consider four journalists. When asked to describe recent work they are proud of, two (one French male, one American female) discuss detailed investigative reports that took months to develop and which explore the impact of government policy on social issues such as homelessness and urban development. The other two journalists (one French male, one American female) talk about human interest stories that, in their view, manage to simultaneously interest audiences while also accurately portraying their subject matters. The biographical characteristics of the respondents immediately suggest that these differences cannot wholly be explained via nationality or gender. How, then, can these differences in work about which these journalists are proud be explained?

In this chapter, we argue that differences in what journalists perceive as professional excellence derive in part from their social origins and professional trajectories. Drawing on the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu, we analyze these differences in "class" terms, with class understood as the outcome of dynamic interactions between one's social origins and trajectories, the position one holds in social space, and one's perceptions of this position. In particular, we argue that place of birth, parents' occupations, and educational attainment correlates with job titles, beats, and the organization for which a journalist works, as well as one's understanding of journalists' purposes and visions of quality. We illustrate this framework by analyzing how social "roots" (i.e., individual origins and trajectories) shape the different views of journalistic excellence described briefly above. In doing so, we suggest that news values—long of interest in the sociology of news[1]—are neither neutral nor entirely the result of individual choices; instead, such values reflect the unequal opportunities available to journalists for realizing differing ideals of professional excellence.

We differentiate this understanding of class from two traditions more commonly found in studies of media and class: Marxist-influenced approaches to political economy and Gramscian-inspired forms of cultural studies. Where Marxists generally emphasize the relationship between labor and class, a Bourdieusian perspective broadens the analysis to social space more generally, including the symbolic aspects of relations of production, in order to make visible the links between social origins and professional trajectories. And while cultural studies usefully demonstrates the importance of issues such as gender and race in shaping the ways individuals produce and consume media, Bourdieu's framework embeds these identities in a relational perspective that specifies the contexts in which particular identity traits (e.g., gender, race, class) do or do not become salient.

While we draw on profiles of journalists from our own work on journalists in France and the United States, we suggest that the approach articulated here could be utilized by scholars examining other aspects of media and class. This might include other sorts of media producers (e.g., musicians,

filmmakers), as well as media consumers. Our aim is not to prove some mechanical argument about class and journalists (i.e., to demonstrate definitively that class shapes roles and perceptions more than other determinants); rather, we seek to show how the Bourdieusian approach might aid empirical analyses of media and class. To achieve those ends, we proceed below by (1) describing a Bourdieusian approach to media and class; (2) distinguishing this approach from Marxist and cultural studies traditions in media and communication scholarship; and (3) illustrating the Bourdieusian approach through an analysis of the ways that class shapes individual journalists' understandings of professional norms and ideals.

A Bourdieusian Approach to Media and Class

Bourdieu is well-known for, among other things, his many studies in the sociology of culture. Rather than look at media *per se* in these studies, his work explored the way culture is produced across a range of discrete social fields, like literature[2] and journalism,[3] as well as the social organization of different cultural practices such as museum attendance[4] and amateur photography.[5] Across each of these studies, he sought to link aesthetic tastes (i.e., judgments held about the beauty of any object or practice) with an individual's social position (i.e., their origins and trajectory). By doing so, he explored the social roots of seemingly abstract values. This effort can be seen most clearly in *Distinction*, his massive study of cultural tastes and lifestyles in France during the 1960s and 1970s.[6]

Three basic principles underpin Bourdieu's[7] approach to class. First, he conceives of class as a *relational* concept. It is not the "real" group—i.e., the specific number of individuals in a given segment of the population—or skill or activity with which Bourdieu concerns himself. Instead, what matters is the way individuals define themselves vis-à-vis individuals located higher or lower than them in "social space" (understood as the juxtaposed relationships that comprise a field of activity). Familiarity with a newspaper like *Le Monde*, to take an example from *Distinction*, constitutes a sign of upper-class status in 1960s France because individuals with greater resources use it to distinguish themselves from less cultured groups. Therefore, one important empirical task for the researcher is to understand how the judgments that any individual or group adopts are related to the judgments taken by others in social space.

Second, Bourdieu[8] views class as *dynamic*. Despite his tendency to emphasize the degree to which classes reproduce themselves,[9] Bourdieu's conceptual approach remains open to the way individuals might challenge their social origins and move in different directions. His early work, for instance, sought to account for what Jurgen Ruesch[10] called "the climbers" (individuals trying to ascend socially) or "the strainers" (individuals trying in vain to ascend); or even what Harold Wilensky and Hugh Edwards[11] termed "the skidders" (individuals in decline). Furthermore, Bourdieu was open to biographical "ruptures"[12] that lead individuals to find themselves in social conditions where they cannot fully master their own behaviors. Here, too, for Bourdieu the empirical question is always how people respond to conditions in which they find themselves, and how their prior experiences shape their capacities to respond.

Finally, Bourdieu views class as containing as much a *symbolic* dimension as an economic one. It is not merely one's wage, salary, or overall economic assets that defines one's class position in an economically-derived hierarchy. Various other assets such as educational attainment, technical knowledge, and social networks, which are symbolic in nature, must also be considered. This symbolic hierarchy can be seen in journalism, for example, in terms of the legitimacy accorded to some forms of reporting (e.g., investigative reporting, long-form storytelling) vis-à-vis less legitimate forms (e.g., clickbait news). Partly because such hierarchies are made to appear natural (i.e., it appears obvious that investigative reporting *is* "better" than clickbait news), Bourdieu sees these struggles over classification as a crucial space of class struggle (as the individuals who produce clickbait are likely to hold fewer economic and symbolic assets than those capable of producing

investigative reporting, and to accept the judgments of those with more assets as the appropriate definition of journalistic excellence).

Through this relational, dynamic, and symbolic approach, Bourdieu offers an account of class that defines class itself as the outcome of (dynamic) interactions between one's social origins and trajectories, the (relational) position one holds in social space, and one's (symbolic) perceptions of these positions. Empirically, this leads him to gather data that can assess these interactions (e.g., including empirical indicators found on surveys, such as place of birth, parents' occupations, educational attainment, and professional title, as well as data derived from interviews identifying aesthetic preferences and judgments). His general hypothesis about class in contemporary capitalist democracies is that such interactions tend to be structured homologously.[13] By this, he means that individuals' social origins often correlate with the social position they hold as well as their perceptions of social space. This homology simultaneously reproduces and legitimates social inequalities, by transforming differences in social origins into differences of aesthetic judgment.

Scholars of French journalism use Bourdieu's framework to shed light on various aspects of class. Lafarge and Marchetti,[14] for example, show that journalists from upper-middle class backgrounds tend to work for national news media, while those from lower-middle class origins are more likely to work for regional outlets. Grossetête[15] shows that journalists tend to report the same event differently depending on the social position of the individuals involved. News coverage of equivalent types of automobile accidents, for example, tends to emphasize irresponsibility when working class individuals are implicated. Professionals (e.g., lawyers, doctors), by contrast, are viewed as having a reason for their behavior (e.g., in a rush to get to a meeting).

While Anglophone researchers also examine class-based aspects of journalistic perception, they tend not to study this issue through a Bourdieusian lens. By using such a lens, we seek to move beyond familiar Anglophone use of concepts, such as field and capital, and instead explore how Bourdieu's relational, dynamic and symbolic approach to class can inform analyses of journalistic ideals.

Bourdieu vis-à-vis other Approaches to Media and Class

Bourdieu's approach to media and class is of course simply one among many. For the purposes of clarity, we briefly review what distinguishes this approach from others commonly used to make sense of media and class. As Bourdieu himself noted,[16] one could easily minimize the differences between his approach and these Marxist-influenced traditions. We distinguish them here not to establish Bourdieu's approach as better or more preferable, but to clarify how and in what ways his approach might inform scholarship on this topic.

The political economic tradition, rooted in the work of Marx, offers one point of contrast. This tradition has long explored media and class in relation to the capitalist mode of production. From this standpoint, the major questions concern how those in media businesses (i.e., the capitalists) accumulate capital while exploiting workers. These workers are sometimes conceived as the individuals employed within a given firm, whether they be journalists,[17] knowledge workers[18] or factory laborers producing digital devices.[19] Other times they are conceived as the individuals whose attention is packaged and sold as a commodity to advertisers.[20] Across both, attention is given to the way capitalists use legal regimes (e.g., intellectual property) and political alliances to further their accumulation of capital via exploitation of working classes.[21] Throughout these inquiries, emphasis is placed on exploitation as it occurs in relations of economic production.

Bourdieu's approach to class differs in two key ways from this Marxist perspective. For starters, he views class not only in terms of relations of production. Rather, for Bourdieu, class pertains to the structure of people's assets, which as noted above include both economic and symbolic dimensions. Thus, he pays little attention to whether or not certain activities count as labor (e.g., whether social media users can be viewed as workers), and instead focuses on how individuals draw on their

various assets to exert power in a given situation (e.g., how a subset of social media users draw on their educational and cultural skills to create jobs for themselves online). Furthermore, Bourdieu, again drawing on his symbolic and dynamic principles, sees class itself as a categorization struggle, where the legitimate definition of the phenomena is a struggle among individuals with differential resources at their disposal to influence the debate.

A second tradition of media and class analysis is found in cultural studies. Often (though not always) inspired by Gramscian theories of hegemony, this tradition documents the ways lower classes interact with and sometimes resist dominant ideologies of the ruling class. Exemplars in this tradition include Hoggart's pioneering work[22] on the relation between attitudes in popular papers and magazines and the working-class readers to whom they are addressed; Morley's examination of the ways the same television program can be interpreted differently by audiences from different class backgrounds;[23] and Skeggs' analysis of the ways women challenge, modify and sometimes reformulate their understanding of both class and gender.[24]

Bourdieu is in substantial affinity with this approach, and in fact helped introduce the early work of Hoggart and others to French audiences.[25] However, his emphasis on a relational understanding of class is one point of difference between the two. Whereas many cultural studies analyses focus primarily on popular or working classes, Bourdieu insists on linking their perceptions to those found across the social space. In Hoggart's reading of class, for instance, the bourgeoisie are largely absent. Additionally, the two approaches likely differ in their reading of resistance. Inspired by Gramsci, cultural studies approaches tend to place more weight on the capacity of lower classes to resist dominant ideologies and find spaces for autonomy. By contrast, Bourdieu, drawing on his theory of symbolic domination,[26] often portrays the judgments of lower classes as influenced by those above them (e.g., in his theory of "cultural goodwill" that lead middle class individuals to admire legitimate culture despite being only somewhat familiar with it).

Thinking with Bourdieu: French and American Journalists' Perceptions of Excellence

In our work, we seek to think with—rather than mechanically apply—Bourdieu's approach to class. Our specific project examines transformations in local journalism in France and the United States.[27] We selected two cities—Toulouse and Seattle—that share a number of affinities. They are of similar size and have comparable levels in the citizenry of education and technology use. They are both home to a number of technology and aeronautics firms (Toulouse is home to Airbus, Seattle to Boeing). Their news media also face parallel pressures. In the past decade, the two have—like those in many cities throughout Western Europe and North America—undergone major transformations. Media have lost considerable proportions of their advertising revenues, and have witnessed large declines in audience share. In both cities, too, internet access is high and growing over time. While job losses have been greater in Seattle, precarious employment is a feature of journalism in both cities, and journalists generally accept that the future of journalism is online.[28]

One dimension of the project examines journalists' perceptions of "good journalism." Given prior research showing that these perceptions vary over time and across space, we conducted interviews with journalists aimed at eliciting these perceptions. In these interviews, journalists were asked to talk about work of which they were especially proud, and to explain why they were proud of it. Additionally, and in keeping with the Bourdieusian premises described above, journalists were asked about other journalists they admired, as well as forms of journalism they disliked. In order to link these perceptions to individual positions and trajectories, we asked each journalist a range of questions about their backgrounds and professional trajectories, including their place of birth, their parents' occupations, the education they received, and their paths into (and, in some cases, out of) journalism.

Below, we provide narratives of four journalists—mentioned at the chapter's outset—that link each's view of professional excellence to their social origins and professional trajectories. Our

presentation of these narratives mirrors those found in Bourdieu's work. Each narrative begins with a quotation from the interviewee, which captures a core aesthetic judgment in the person's own words. The narratives then describe the individual's social origins and trajectory, ensuring that readers see the dynamism and particularity of a given individual's professional trajectory. They culminate with descriptions of journalistic excellence, with individuals discussing work they are proud, as well as journalism they admire or dislike.

The two journalists that describe being proud of long-form reporting on social issues are featured first. They have several biographical features in common. Both come from professional families and attended prestigious universities. Both experienced tensions early in their journalism careers that arose from a disconnect between what they were then doing and what they wanted to do, which led both to make major moves (away from New York and Paris, respectively). Both ultimately found themselves in Seattle and Toulouse—cities outside of their nation's media capitals—doing work they were proud of, even as ongoing cutbacks in the media industry create instability for each. For each, we can see a homology between their social origins, professional trajectories, and vision of quality journalism.

The two journalists that take pride in human interest stories they reported accurately also share several biographical features. Both come from working class families and attained higher levels of education than anyone else in their families. Their professional trajectories from working to middle class simultaneously reflect their relative ascent from their social origins, as well as their greater precarity vis-à-vis other journalists. Both articulate a tension between the journalism they are proud of and the journalism they would ultimately like to do, with the latter often corresponding to the more legitimate forms of journalism that emphasize long-form investigations. Such tensions, we suggest, indicate a form of "cultural goodwill," whereby they admire symbolically more legitimate forms of journalistic work that they do not have the working conditions to do. As with the other two journalists, we can see a homology between their social origins, professional trajectories, and visions of quality journalism.

"I Do Long-form, Deeply Reported Stories About Social Issues"

Esther[29] was born in a city in the American Midwest. Her father was a university history professor who studied civil rights. As a doctoral student, he wrote a dissertation about the history of "muckraking" journalism in the United States. Esther attended college at an elite liberal arts school on the East Coast, and did internships at elite, progressive news magazines that emphasize deep reporting and stylistic writing. One summer, she worked for the *New Yorker*. Another summer, she did fact-checking at *The Nation*.

After graduating, Esther started as a reporter for a community newspaper in Brooklyn, and then quickly got a job at a community newspaper "across the river" in the state of New Jersey. This was a "very intense boot camp in journalism" where she wrote three news articles a day. Listening to her describe this early work, one gets the sense that this was important training but not entirely enjoyable given the focus on "hard core daily turnaround" that drove the coverage.

From there, Esther moved to Africa and freelanced from Zimbabwe and South Africa for two years during the time in which the African National Congress (ANC) was banned and Nelson Mandela was freed from prison. She wrote for several newspapers. While there, she sought to do a different form of journalism: "I had really tried to move myself from doing that kind of really hard-core daily turnaround kind of journalism to doing more thoughtful features." After a few years of living and working in South Africa, she returned to the United States and moved to Seattle because her brother—a university professor in the life sciences—lived there.

She found work at an alternative weekly newspaper. During this time, Esther says that she moved "towards this longer magazine style journalistic" reporting. She worked there "for a really long time" (20 years) doing "long-form, deeply reported stories about social issues." She does not

mention it in the interview, but that newspaper changed owners in 2013 and proceeded to lay-off many of the staff. In 2015, for example, nearly a third of employees were laid off. During that same year, what she describes as "this wonderful job" opened up at the *Seattle Times*, "which was very similar in a lot of ways" to what she was already doing (social issues focused, enterprise reporting). "It was just perfect for me and that is where I am now."

When asked to discuss work she is proud of, she talked about a mother on the verge of homelessness who struggled to find housing:

> I really liked it because I love to do those kinds of stories that are able to tell a larger story through one person's life. So, it's a way of making it very real for people and also you are bringing a narrative in getting people involved emotionally but you are also talking about a much larger issue. So, in that case I talked about a whole array of issues including recent shifts in homeless policy and the way the nonprofits were handling homeless people, and problems with the system, and the way the federal government was dealing with this subsidy program and all sorts of larger issues that could be told through one person's life. So, I was very glad to be able to do that in a story for the *Times*, which is something that they—that was part of why they hired me to bring this kind of stories.

When asked about other news she reads, she responded: "I canvas a lot." She mentioned her old newspaper, as well as social media feeds "to see some of the breaking [news] stuff that might be going on." She doesn't watch television news nor read a local alternative publication. Instead, "I … read national news, which is often just as important not only because it will have some local stuff.…" But, she explained, because it is "important to know all the national trends going on because that interacts very much with what's happening here—whether a local version of it is happening here or know something to look into or whatever." To emphasize the point, she concluded the thought with the following remark: "I always read the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* and stuff like that."

"I Am the Only One who Knows all the Details About That Story"

Pierre was born in downtown Toulouse and grew up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood. His father was a prestigious lawyer in the region, his mother a housewife. His early education took place in a private Catholic school. His family expected him to become a lawyer; however, Pierre disliked the university and got what he described as bad grades. His only passion at that time was his participation at a well-regarded private local radio station. After a push from his father to obtain a degree, he enrolled at a recognized private journalism school. After graduation, he moved to Paris and worked for a prestigious private radio station where he found a "very comfortable position." He earned some prestige in Paris because he offered a left-political perspective on a right-oriented station. He is proud of himself because he "made [his] way living in Paris, having money, recognition … and [his] father would listen to [him] on the radio".

After seven years in Paris, his boss proposed that he become a "multimedia journalist" (MMJ) in southern France. He accepted because he would have a lot of money with "his upper Parisian income and very low costs of living down there." Two years after, he realizes he hates breaking news and burns out. "I was kind of frustrated … and tired. You never fully sleep, actually. One night out of two someone calls you at any time and tells you to go to the event, even on weekends." He explained that this job focused only on productivity. "The only thing you need is productivity. The accent is on the quantity, never the quality. You are nothing but an executant." Summing up that segment of his life, he said: "I am one of those who did a burnout in [that media company]. That's why I left … I was not the only one. Among MMJ, we are many to have "cracked" under the pressure".

Worried about his health, his parents proposed that he return to Toulouse with his wife and small daughter. They did, and Pierre decided to launch a magazine based on investigative "slow" journalism with some journalist friends. Doing so allowed him to produce journalism he could be proud of again:

> This is it. This relation to time is marvelous. When you move from breaking news to a monthly magazine … you have the time to have perspective, to really be sure of weighting every word and to *say something* about our society. Now we´re printing subjects we decided 1 or 2 years ago … this gives me the chance to show my writing talents. […] To me, true journalism is the one you show with your *belle plume*. I am very proud of showing that I can write interesting and deep things. I am not only the guy from the breaking news who is perceived to be a scavenger.

When asked about the story he is most proud of, he talked about a local government proposal from the 1960s and 1970s to culvert the city's main canal. He said that what interested him was the intellectual work required to make sense of government actions. "What's interesting there is that you can tell how much mentalities have changed in 40 years and how difficult it is to understand the machinery of public policies." He takes pride in the time he dedicated to the project: "I spent a lot of time writing it […]. The inquiry took several months. I found many witnesses from that time. I made a lot of interviews to specialists. I spent a lot of time in the archives." Finally, he emphasizes his grasp of the subject matter and his attention to detail: "I am the only one who knows all the details about that story. And I put a lot of attention to details."

Asked to describe journalists he admires and follows, Pierre focused entirely on those based in Paris: the online news site *Mediapart* and magazine *Revue XXI*, which were started by the famed investigative journalists Edwy Plenel and Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, respectively. "They are passionate and audacious," he says. "They have embodied their ideals and I really appreciate that." He also admires the result: "Because *Mediapart* is the symbol of the press freedom. They give life to the left press (*la presse de gauche*). I don't know if it's correct to say left, I mean alternative … free. It's a real free press." Explaining further, he says: "They are a little bit left oriented but they criticize everyone, one side or the other. They are free. It is freedom that amazes me. Mostly in a place like Toulouse where journalists are not really free."

"I Think I Told the Story Well"

Emily was born in a small town—population just under 2000—in the American west. Her mother was a county clerk who filed birth certificates, marriage notices and death announcements; she attended a regional public university but did not graduate from it. Her father, now retired, was a welder.

Emily attended the major state university. When she arrived there, she was unsure what she should study. During freshman orientation, her mother heard the dean of the journalism school tell the parents that if their kids were rebels, they should send them to him and he would make a "hell of a reporter" out of them. "My mom was like, 'You should check out the journalism school.'" Initially, Emily had thought about studying Communication. Ultimately, she decided on journalism because a Communication degree required a class on interpersonal communication whereas journalism required only drama. "I was like, oh drama sounds like an easier A, so let's do that. And once I got there, the professors got me interested in what I was doing and I got sucked in." She focused on broadcast journalism because a print-journalism professor told her she was "talentless" and unfit for print journalism.

After graduation, Emily got a job at a production company doing entertainment and sports-related programming. In her view, it was an OK first job but she wanted to travel and get out of

the state. She left and took a job in Denver as a flight attendant, then got a job at Alaska Airlines. "Great benefits, union jobs, but I just wasn't passionate about it. I wasn't intellectually challenged. I was bored." When asked to expand on what that meant, she replied: "I just missed writing and talking to people, having a job that I like going to every day. It sounds crazy when you look at the paychecks and the benefits. But I love what I do."

Emily then got a job at a newspaper in rural Washington, and did community reporting for two years. She was writing 7–10 stories per week, and a reporter's job came up at a suburban daily outside Seattle that focused on Boeing. She decided to apply for it. "And they did not like me for that job. But they liked me." She therefore got a job focused on rural communities around the suburb. At the time of the interview, she was working on this beat. In the two years since, she moved on: first, to a newspaper in another state, but also in a metropolitan setting, where she worked for six months; later, she returned to Washington state and reported for a chain of weekly newspapers on the coast. This lasted just under a year and a half. Now she is based again in Seattle as a freelancer.

When asked to describe a story she is proud of, she talked about a "little Iraqi boy" who was blinded at the age of two when he got shot in the face. A local family in the Seattle area adopted him, and Emily was tasked with doing a profile about him.

> It was the first story that I have gotten and spent a good amount of time on. I went there [to the boy's home] several times over the course of reporting, and it took months and months to build [a] relationship with the boy. And I really got to slow down and go in more depth with something. So I really enjoy working on that and this story came out really nice. I think I told the story well. And I have seen other reporters cover him and call him disfigured and stuff like that. And I just thought that that was completely, I mean he is a kid. You do not say that. Even though his face is severely disfigured, I did not think it was really necessary to point that out seven times in the same story.

Questioned about media she likes, initially Emily responded by naming a colleague at her newspaper, who is "a terrific writer." But she also followed up quickly by mentioning Matt Taibbi, a well-known contributing editor at a national magazine whose writes about politics. ("I really do not know how to spell his last name properly. He writes a lot of good stuff"). When asked what she likes about his reporting, she responds: "I really like his long form reporting. I would love to write some of the political features he does, like [in] *Rolling Stone*." Later in the interview, she said that her beat is challenging. "I really wish that I had a larger subject area to write about." She explained that an editor thought every story should take four hours to produce. "I was like, well, I like more time." She also stated she would like to make public records requests without asking for permission.

We ask her if there is anything she would like her news organization to do. She replied pithily: "Pay people better." We ask if there is anything we ought to know. She said: "No. I mostly just want to tell you how much people work on their own time … I was really surprised when I came from a union job to journalism." She described her surprise upon learning that "everybody thinks that it's totally fine to just work 12 hours and put down 8 on your time card, when you are making 27,000 dollars a year in the first place. That was really shocking to me." She paused, but continued by noting the difficulty of even having a job in journalism. "We are lucky to have one anyway. We are getting paid at least enough to make it a part-time job." When asked if she ever put down the full hours worked on her time card, she replied: "I was told you just have to write yourself into a better job."

"I Will Never Tell Sordid Details"

Victor was born and raised in a social housing area in Bordeaux. His father used to be a worker and his mother still is a nursery assistant. Growing up, he was a good student. In high school, a teacher encouraged him to attend university. While he did not score well enough on his entrance exams to go to the country's most prestigious universities in Paris or Bordeaux, a public program (*Egalité des chances*) for students with good grades and limited resources led him to be accepted at Sciences Po Toulouse. It was the only "Grande Ecole" to which he gained entry.

Victor liked the idea of a broad-based education in the Humanities and Social Sciences rather than a narrow technical specialization. He also knew that students coming from Grandes Ecoles tend to get better jobs than those that do not. He entered into journalism immediately after graduation, which is somewhat unusual in France as the specialization for a journalism degree starts after undergraduate studies are completed. He explained his reason for entering the workforce immediately, and reflected on how it impacted his career:

> When I finished Sciences Po, I got some information about continuing in a prestigious journalism school … but … I really didn't want to keep on studying. I was tired, and besides … I'm in [a relationship] with someone who has worked since the age of 16. It became harder and harder to still be the eternal student whereas my wife kept working. So, I wanted to do something else and get to work and not keep studying. […] Perhaps if I had studied more, I would do another type of journalism … I would love having the time to do more interviewing, to have the time to cross different points of view … which I cannot do at the radio. There, we literally work day-to-day. When we have something to write, it should be ready in the next hour.

Initially, Victor found work as a freelancer for an online news startup and a magazine. Both are now out of business. He then secured a one-year contract at the local radio station, and he did not contain his excitement about this during our interview. "I have a contract that lasts for one year! This is my second one-year contract, and it will last until May." The contract removes some of the uncertainty associated with freelancing. Victor described himself as "grateful" for having it. He said this despite having a salary that is scarcely more than minimum wage and comes with difficult conditions (he works from 4 am until noon). Thinking of his wife and parents, who work standing all day long, he says that at least he has an "office, a computer, and I sit."

When asked about something he had done and was very proud of, he couldn't think of anything in particular. He tries to do his best every day on every note. After thinking, he said he's proud of never speaking about crime in a sordid or sensationalist way. He hates doing news that is oriented to gossip or sensationalism.

> So, for example, for me … crime stories … I'm not interested. If they ask me to add crime stories, I will adapt myself. Sure. Because sometimes you have nothing else, and you have two minutes to be filled … so … voilà. Sometimes in the local dailies crime stories are extremely well detailed, and that's something I do not like. So, if I have to say that someone was found dead, I will only say that one person was found dead […] I will never tell sordid details! I believe that sordid details are awful for the radio … I find them inappropriate. Even some words in radio, violent terms as blood, members, someone dismembered.… To use those terms in the radio, or explicit sexual terms … I think it might offend the listener.… So, sometimes there's something like the self-censorship [in terms of sensationalism]. But it's me who does not want to talk about that. I will try to say something different … something people will feel concerned about beyond the gossip.

When asked about the media he likes, he stated the difference between what he likes and what he uses at work. "If we talk about dailies, I read *Le Monde*, *Rue 89* and of course *Le monde diplomatique*. I even pay for the subscription.… It really does not correspond to the editorial policy of the radio I work for." For his job, he explained he uses Agence France Presse and *Le Parisien*. When asked why, he answers:

> It is very simple. I work for a music-oriented radio station. A station where news is not that important. We are not opening with international news … we will open with the gas price … those kind of things … things that journalists call "concerning". This means that it concerns, it interests the average listener who is listening to the music and that listens to a 2-minute flash. This means, the essential stuff … we will not open with the news in *Le Monde* or in *France Culture* … Indeed, we limit ourselves to something "white" … meaning … banal. On my side, I do listen to the radio to get the news. I listen to France Inter and FIP.… They do not really correspond to the editorial policy of the organization I work for … by the way, these preferences have produced some little problems in my job but I've learned how to adapt myself.

Conclusion

The above interviews suggest that journalists' social origins and trajectories can shed light on their professional ideals. Doing so, we suggest, enables a view of the social roots of journalists' perceptions. Victor's trajectory, for example, is one of ascent from working class origins (he is the first person in the family to get an office job), and his university experience cultivated an appreciation for dominant journalistic ideals (as evidenced by his news consumption habits). Yet these origins also limit his ascent and shape his understanding of professional excellence. While further education would increase his chances of professional advancement, Victor didn't want to be the "eternal student" because it would be unfair to his partner. And because his current job sometimes requires him to cover crime news, he focused on accurately portraying the events while avoiding "sordid" details.

Esther's rather different social origins and trajectory also shape her professional ideals. Born into a family of liberal professionals, her university experience exposed her to internship experiences that emphasized deep reporting and stylistic writing. These ideals reflect an upper-middle class emphasis on justice and civil rights, as does her decision to leave the "hard core daily turnaround" of community newspapers for the "more thoughtful" reporting possible in South Africa. This vision of journalistic excellence largely ignores the unequal opportunities available for journalists to achieve it. Esther talked, for example, about the "wonderful job" she found doing exactly the type of reporting she values in Seattle at a time of massive layoffs for other journalists.

By empirically examining the links between social origins, trajectories and perceptions, the Bourdieusian approach suggests that journalists' norms are neither neutral nor abstract. Instead, they reflect the unequal opportunities afforded to journalists to realize specific values. Beyond the case of journalists' perceptions, Bourdieu also offers a framework for thinking of class as relational, dynamic, and symbolic. This does not suggest other variables like national origins or gender do not matter; it also does not imply that any homology occurs mechanically.

Scholars of media and class, especially in the Anglophone world, have increasingly integrated Bourdieu into their theoretical toolkits. His concepts of field, habitus and capital, for example, are increasingly utilized to explain who produces and consumes various forms of media. Somewhat surprisingly, Bourdieu's attempt to rethink class, and move beyond what he considered some of Marxism's limitations, remain relatively underutilized in media and communication. The current chapter offers a small step to addressing this gap by explaining the Bourdieusian approach to media and class, contrasting it with Marxist understandings, and briefly illustrating it with some of our own empirical research.

Notes

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6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
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24 Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997).
25 Philippe Coulangeon and Julien Duval, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Bourdieu's Distinction* (London: Routledge, 2015).
26 Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
27 Matthew Powers and Sandra Vera-Zambrano, "Explaining the Formation of Online News Startups in France and the United States: A Field Analysis," *Journal of Communication* 66, no. 5 (2016): 857–877.
28 See the overview in Matthew Powers, Sandra Vera-Zambrano, and Olivier Baisnée, "The News Crisis Compared: The Impact of the Journalism Crisis in Toulouse, France and Seattle, Washington," in *The Uncertain Future of Local Journalism*, ed. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (London: IB Tauris: 2016), 31–50.
29 In order to protect identities, all names have been changed, and cities outside of Toulouse and Seattle have been described in general terms (e.g., a Midwestern city).