

Presentation by

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Public interest and private passions: Journalism students' construction of their professional identity.

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Association for
Journalism
Education, UK

t: twitter.com/TheAJEUK
f: facebook.com/AJEUK
j: journalism-education.org
w: ajeuk.org

Background:

How do we prepare students for the world of journalism?



Background: Construction of journalism

1. What journalists say (both privately and publically)
2. What educational establishments say
3. What industry says
4. What accreditation bodies say

And

5. What the academic research/debates say.

The headlines:

1. Journalists are born not made
2. Journalists are made not born
3. Journalists need to reflect on the above (critical thinking)



Confused? You would be.



Our questions was:

What do students think
about journalism after being
taught by us?

Previous research on the effects of journalism education:

“Prior to entering a professional work setting, most U.S.* journalists learn the scripts of what it means to be a journalist as a student in academia.”

(Carpenter et al, 2015)

*Same is true of UK journalists



A lot of quantitative survey data*

Mostly concerned with how aligned student attitudes are to traditional views of normative ideas of journalism's role.

Mixed bag of results



*Cf - Global Journalism survey, Hanusch (2013), Hanna and Saunders (2012)

Qualitative Data

Face to face interviews with

34 journalism students from

UWE

and

Bournemouth University

Questions about

1. Past
2. Present
3. Future



Methodology:

Discourse analysis:

Conversations not treated as description of reality

Rather we are interested in how journalism is discursively constructed

And

What kind of 'interpretive repertoires' are used.

Can indicate the dominant discourses.



Findings:

1. Normative discourse
2. What is 'proper' journalism
3. What students want for themselves
4. Divisions
5. Futures



Findings: Normative discourse of journalism

- To hold power to account.
- To inform
- To represent a plurality of voices



Findings: Normative discourse of journalism

What I think it should be is, obviously, to tell the truth and be that sort of, what's it called, the whole watchdog thing.

I'd say it's to report the facts of stories – and that doesn't necessarily mean following political agendas, it's what's most relevant to the public and the public interest, and also holding the establishment, the people in power, to account for the public...

Without journalists the world would be screwed, that might be quite a biased opinion because I'm a journalist and I'm studying journalism. I really believe it though, if you didn't have a free press, then that's how dictators rule. It's how they do rule in other parts of the world.

Findings: What is 'proper' Legacy v. Digital Natives

Well, I've always thought, "I would love to have a placement at the BBC." Everyone always says, "Why the BBC? What are you saying that?" I just say, "Well, I'd be grateful to go to any of the well-known broadcasters or anything." You'd still feel a bit like, "Oh, yes, this is so cool. This is what I want to do."

Obviously I have aspirations to be the editor at the BBC. Everyone has that.

You look at the BBC as the pinnacle of journalism, the ultimate news source. I do anyway, I've always grown up with it like that.

Findings: What is 'proper' Legacy v. Digital Natives

Yes, I'd love to work at BuzzFeed, that would be great, but again, again, that's more media than journalism. I don't think that's proper journalism.

I've had this conversation a lot with friends of mine. I think clickbait, fake news, and sites like BuzzFeed. I've always said BuzzFeed, I don't really think, ever really claim to be a news source. For me, personally, I'm very black and white about that. I just stick to BBC, to Sky News, Sky Sports News; just places that I trust.

Findings: What students want for themselves: 1. Creativity

I've always been good at writing. I knew I wanted to go to uni, so it was kind of like a natural fit that I went to study journalism somewhere.

When I was younger, I always wanted to be a book writer or novelist or something like that, that's very... You know, the dream world.

I was thinking, "What can I do music related that will nourish my writing ability?" I feel like I've got certain social skills that also lend myself towards journalism, so I guess those are the two most predominant ones.

Findings: What students want for themselves: 1. Creativity

Yes. The reason I wanted to study journalism is that I always liked English, my English lessons, literature, and stuff like that. From there, I also liked drama. I used to be the lead in most of the school plays, which are some of the proudest moments in my life. I used to really enjoy acting. I was doing it for a few years, and then I decided I don't think this is actually for me, in terms of going into a career in acting. I didn't think I was good enough, etc. What I decided to do instead was to combine English and, sort of, drama. In a way I see it as storytelling, I suppose. I decided I wanted to get involved with journalism.

Yes. It probably stems from creativity to be honest. I've always been quite creative. When I was 14 or 15 I quit playing football, which I used to channel my creative energies. I don't know, I need a creative outlet I think. I found it through writing and journalism.

Findings: Positioning the boundaries – creative not clever

Sometimes there are issues that I think, "Oh I'd really like..." I do have that feeling, but I'm not going to lie, it's not... Maybe it's because I've lived, always, quite a relatively easy life, the things that motivate me are just my own interests. I'm not, at this stage- I'm not going to say that in the third year, or when I'm a little bit older, that won't change. But at this stage I'm not like, "Right, I need to go out, I need to change this, I really need to make my mark." I'm just, at this stage in my first year, like, "Right, how am I going to transition this degree into something that I want to do, that I'm going to really enjoy?"

No, I don't think so. I don't want to change the world. I don't think I can change the world. As a journalist, what I want to do is- I just quite enjoy reporting the news and informing people what is going on, whether that be across multi-media. ...I don't do it because I'm angry, I do it because I feel a sense of pride when I complete something.

Findings: Positioning the boundaries – creative not clever

I don't know. I feel like I'm quite creative, but I don't know if journalists are creative, do you know what I mean? I know that they are very good at what they do and they're intelligent, I mean, you have to be intelligent in order to put out news because you just do, don't you?

As a journalist, when you're trained, everyone can cover the breaking news story. Like if there is a terrorist event or something horrible like that. Everyone can report the facts as they are. It's very different finding a story, bringing that voice out, gaining the trust of those people. It's so important.

Findings: Positioning the boundaries – creative not clever

Respondent: *Yes, I like featury stuff, but I don't know if that's really relevant to...*

Interviewer: *Is that not journalism?*

Respondent: *Is it? I don't like going out... I do like it I just don't... I couldn't do it as a job. There was this guy at Radio Bristol and he had a politics degree and he was such a smart man and his job was just to sit there and do the hourly bulletin and he would just sit there all day like writing up the thingy, what he was going to say, go in record it, come back and do the next hour. That would be the worst thing for me and he's such an educated man and he was so smart and you just think, "This is what you're doing; you're doing this five days a week do you not get bored?"*

Findings: Positioning the boundaries – creative not clever

I am afraid of the rinse, repeat kind of schedule that you get into at some point, just getting into a routine....I would like to potentially work in TV but not necessarily in journalism in the traditional sense of journalism at the very least.

It was still they put you at any computer that's free on that day, it's a small newsroom and that was actually a really enjoyable experience, but I was just never that into just covering news, because it's very 'press release', 'fire tree'. Basic, basically.

If it doesn't get me going creatively it bores me and I don't like it, and that's about it. To me this whole semester has been really just like churning out and motivating through a lot of things to make myself do it.

Findings: Positioning the boundaries – creative not clever

[with soft story] We got to learn something new. I am not sure that you get to learn new things in hard stories. Obviously you learn what happened but you don't expand your view of the world.

[my work partner] and I always choose those soft stories. Well not always but mainly we do soft stories because we find them more interesting to do. Because obviously when you have a hard story you have to contact this and this person and it is very clear on whom you have to talk to.....We started choosing those soft stories because in a soft story you are less restricted....

[I like] writing something in my own time than necessarily banging out a news story really quickly.

Findings: The pragmatics

'I'll take anything I can get at the moment'

So I guess there are no real... I'll take anything I can get at the moment. Straight out of uni, you'll take anything you can get

To be honest, I think, with anything in life, wherever you want to get to, I would personally do any role in journalism because I think, even if you hate it, it's good to experience it.

Am I prepared for the precarity of it? I suppose I am, I've already come to terms with the fact I'm not going to walk into a job, I've already come to terms with the fact it's going to take me a long time to get a position that's really going to hit on the knuckles of what I really want to do long term. I'm probably going to have to take a few jobs as stepping stones to that job. The reality is that and I have come to terms with that.

Findings: The pragmatics

Ready for anything

I'm actually completely unfazed by it. I feel like I have a very good understanding of how all that sort of thing works. I could be completely wrong. I might have no idea how it works. But I'm not massively fazed ... If I start working for a radio station out of uni, I don't want that to be a job for life. I want to be there for four or five years, maybe, maximum, and then I want to be like, "Okay, now, I want to go and work in TV, because I can."

I'm really optimistic about the future personally. I don't feel like the career, itself, is in a crisis or anything like that. I just feel like it's going to dramatically change, and I'll just roll with whatever happens to it really.

Discussion:

1. Normative discourse only present in some situations
2. Powerful discourse of individualism/consumerism (constructed as 'creativity')
3. Individualism more deeply entrenched in students than civic duty
4. Opening up of divisions between different types of journalism where normative professional journalism is 'othered'
5. How do journalism educators respond to this individualism?

