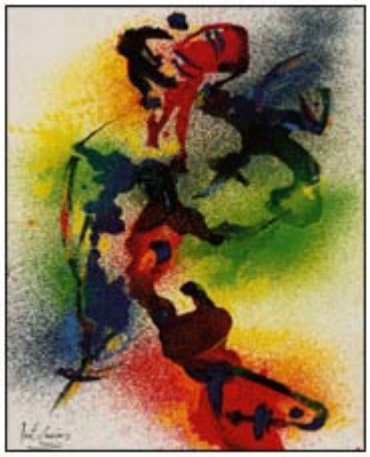
6th ESA CONFERENCE
MURCIA
2003

RESEARCH NETWORKS 15

Sociology of Professions



Rethinking the Concept of Professionalism: the Case of Journalism

Meryl Aldridge
and
Julia Evetts

Revised version

Rethinking the Concept of Professionalism: the Case of Journalism

Meryl Aldridge
School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
Nottingham NG7 2RD
tel: +44 (0)115-951 5425
FAX: +44 (0)115-951 5232
email: meryl.aldridge@nottingham.ac.uk

Julia Evetts
School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
Nottingham NG7 2RD
tel: +44 (0)115-951 5396
FAX: +44 (0)115-951 5232
email: julia.evetts@nottingham.ac.uk

Total word length 8307 of which coversheet and abstract 225, notes and bibliography 1311

Version dated 26 June 2003

Abstract

Journalists in the UK have always been ambivalent about what form of occupational control to pursue. Although resistant to the structures of the conventional profession, they have embraced the idea of 'professionalism'. As the formations traditionally associated with Anglo-American professions become relevant to fewer and fewer employees and increasingly subject to external regulation it is more relevant, we suggest, to investigate how the discourse of 'professionalism' as a set of values and identities can be mobilized by employers as a form of *self*-discipline. Journalism, notable for its powerful occupational mythology, provides a vivid example of how this process has eased the imposition of radical changes to the organization of work. Now, ironically, recent changes in the occupation's social composition and training may mean that journalists, who have always cherished a self-image as socially marginal, will aspire to conventional professional respectability.

Keywords: professions; journalism; occupational change; self-identity

Rethinking the Concept of Professionalism: the Case of Journalism

Introduction: changing work; changing theory

Journalism in the UK emerged as a distinct occupation in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Chalaby 1998; Lee1976). Almost from the first, practitioners disagreed about whether they should try to attain the conventional structures and social standing associated with being a 'profession' in Anglo-American societies. In 1907 this resulted in a secession by what became the National Union of Journalists from the original representative group, the Chartered Institute of Journalists. The dispute has never been resolved - and the basis of it is still evident on the two organizations' websites (www.nuj.org.uk; www.ioj.co.uk).

If journalists themselves were, and still are, ambivalent about the professional project, commentators have been briskly dismissive of any possible claim. Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933: 268, 266) write of the early attempts to professionalize '… there were increasingly few men whose position evoked a sense of responsibility'; 'It is the function of the modern journalist to serve behind the counter', before closing their discussion with an attack on what is now known as 'chequebook journalism'. By 1996 Tunstall could only conclude 'In the consensual 1960s British journalism was far from being an established profession; but it was moving in a "professionalizing" direction … by the 1990s "professionalization" had gone backwards' (1996: 141).

What is striking is that Tunstall, whose classic *Journalists at Work* (1971) is one of the few sociological studies in the field, does not interrogate

what is meant by ‘profession’. Unsurprisingly, practitioner commentators (for example Delano and Henningham 1995) are even more inclined to use the term without explication. The episodic debate about modes of occupational control in journalism has persisted with an implicit model of professionalism as a set of professional ‘traits’ that was abandoned by sociology thirty years ago.

The subsequent characterization of professionalism as an occupational project of market closure and occupational enhancement has never been applied to journalism. In the 1990s, however, researchers began to recuperate the positives of professionalism as well as its negatives for customers, clients and social systems, and to reclaim the standing of the concept in wider sociological debates. For example, Freidson (1994, 2001) argues that professionalism is a unique form of occupational control of work well-suited to providing complex, discretionary services to the public and goes on to suggest how the virtues of professionalism (the ‘third logic’) can be reinforced.

This reappraisal (see, for instance, Halliday 1987; Burrage and Torstendahl 1990; Annandale 1998) is not institution-focused, returning instead to the theme of professionalism as a normative value central to early analyses. Durkheim (1992/[1890-1912]) characterized professionalism as a form of moral community based on occupational membership, and Tawney (1921) as a force capable of subjecting rampant individualism to the needs of the community. Marshall (1950) emphasized altruism or the ‘service’ orientation of professionalism as a bulwark against threats to stable democratic processes. For Parsons (1951) the professional’s training should cultivate the proper balance between self- and collectivity-interest which,

sustained by interaction with the occupational community, is vital to social order.

Alongside this reappraisal of professional formations as semi-autonomous forces for stability a new interpretation of professionalism as a means of occupational *change and control* is being developed. How is the powerful appeal of professionalism as a *discourse* rather than an array of institutional protections or checklist of 'traits' being used in places of work as a mechanism to facilitate and promote occupational change and the self-discipline of professionalized workers? To return to a question originally asked by Larson (1977): why and in what ways have a set of work practices and relations that historically characterized medicine and law in Anglo-American societies (at least for a period in their histories), resonated first with engineers, accountants and teachers, and then (to add to Larson's list) with pharmacists, social workers, care assistants, computer experts and law enforcement agencies in different social systems around the world?

We will argue that journalism provides a clear example of the discourse of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change, and in particular its power as a form of self-discipline (Foucault 1979) or control 'at a distance' (Miller and Rose 1990; Burchell *et al*. 1991; Fournier 1999) because this is a discourse constructed and utilized as much by managers in news organizations as by journalist practitioners themselves. Concluding, we shall suggest that the changing meaning of professionalism in the wider society, its multiple meanings in journalism's own occupational ideology, demography and unplanned changes in journalism education are all combining to enfold journalists in a respectability that they have traditionally resisted.

Rival models of occupational control in journalism

From the mid-nineteenth century, developments in printing and distribution technologies converged with rising levels of literacy and the new income stream from advertising to transform the newspaper and periodical press into a largescale and profitable industry serving a mass audience (Chalaby 1998; Lee 1976; Schudson 1978; Smith 1978). With this change came greatly expanded employment opportunities and increased social respectability for those collecting the news. The first attempt to organize the workforce clearly demonstrates this desire to identify with the emerging middle class. The National Association of Journalists was formed in 1884: by 1890 it had acquired a Royal Charter and become the Chartered Institute of Journalists, dedicated to the '"elevation of the status and improvement of the qualifications of all members of the journalistic profession"' (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933: 268 quoting from charter). According to Christian (1980: 278) this determined the Institute's strategy henceforth: 'The dominant faction … assumed that early achievement of a Royal Charter … had firmly established journalism as a profession and that little further was needed'. Many members did not agree. Demands to pay less attention to social status and the sensibilities of proprietors and more to their poor pay and working conditions led to the formation of the National Union of Journalists in 1907. The new union was hardly radical. 'Its title … was modelled on that of the National Union of Teachers, its rules were borrowed from the Engineers' Society but its general demeanour followed that of various recently-formed clerical unions' (Tunstall 1971:70). Internal disputes about affiliation to the Trades Union Congress were recurrent throughout the 1920s and 1930s; and alliances with

the ‘hoi polloi of the industrial world’ like the printers were specifically rejected during its early history (Christian 1980: 288).

Between 1916 and 1971 there were repeated attempts to merge the IoJ and the NUJ, but all failed over the original and fundamental disagreement about whether an effective employees’ organization could have proprietors or senior managers in membership. Gradually the NUJ became dominant, as it still is, despite being almost destroyed during the 1980s (Gall 1998; Majoribanks 2000; Tunstall 1996: ch. 8). Today the NUJ claims 34,000 members. The first page of its website (www.nuj.org.uk) says that it has ‘fought for journalists, their pay and conditions, their working rights and their professional freedom’ since its founding. By contrast, the IoJ (www.ioj.co.uk) describes itself as ‘a truly independent professional organisation … justly proud of its heritage … free of political or other ties’; ‘The Institute has always been willing to work with media owners and is respected by employers’ organisations as a responsible trade union which prefers to negotiate rather than confront’. There is no mention of membership numbers anywhere in the site.

For nearly a century, therefore, the main collective voice of UK journalism has been that of a ‘wages movement’ (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933: 268) which has accepted the self-definition of journalism as a highly skilled craft best prepared for through apprenticeship. According to Elliott (1978) the economic crises of the 1930s affected journalism less than most employment sectors. Presumably this relative security, combined with its historic origins specifically in opposition to élitist strategies of ma rket closure, explains why the NUJ did not, in its early years, give high priority to the issue

of what educational qualifications should be required for entry, nor to the enforcement of training standards for those in post. The preoccupation was raising levels of pay, particularly in the local and regional press, where the bulk of the membership worked. Beyond that were considerations of security and continuity of employment in an industry which had (and has) a large element of casual and freelance working. For example, the need for an occupational pension scheme with transferable rights was a recurrent theme in the NUJ's evidence to both the 1947-49 and 1977 Royal Commissions on the Press[1] (Cmd. 7700 1949; Cmnd. 6810 1977).

The IoJ, meanwhile, continued with its mission to secure the social standing of journalists through statute. In 1936, and again in 1937, it sponsored a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons. On both occasions the bill failed to get a second reading. The draft bill, reproduced as part of the IoJ memorandum of evidence to the 1947-49 Royal Commission, provides for a Journalists' Registration Council of the United Kingdom; for the title journalist to be reserved for those registered; for a code of conduct; and for de-registration of those offending against the code. 'It is by consolidating journalists for the maintenance of a code of conduct that the profession will become a profession in the best sense of the word, insulated against improper pressures and influences of all kinds, including any that may arise from the proprietorial structures of the Press' (Royal Commission 1947: 27). The Institute pursued its case again with the 1977 Commission. On both occasions it was politely rebuffed on the ostensible grounds of the potential dangers to freedom of expression if deregistration resulted in becoming unemployable. Presumably, however, the employers, who were well

represented on the commissions, had no inclination to be party to employees' moving towards market closure. Why would they risk the possibility of journalists being able to invoke a professional code to refuse assignments, or to reject the imposition of editorial policy on the selection and presentation of news once collected? As McManus (1994: 203) has summed it up in more contemporary terms: 'A reporter or editor in a profit-maximizing media firm who subordinates market standards to those of journalism may be tolerated about as long as a counter clerk at McDonald's who refused to sell fried food'.

Nor, of course, was any support forthcoming from the NUJ, which never much liked the messenger and became less and less interested in the message. During the 1960s and 1970s, the most fruitful period for improving journalists' conditions, a policy of assertive white collar unionism was pursued, resulting in better pay, shorter hours and a near-closed shop (Christian 1980; Tunstall 1996). Part of this move leftwards, and thus even further from the strategy and tactics of the IoJ, was political but it was also more consonant with the entrenched individualism that has always been a key element of journalists' occupational ideology (Aldridge 1998; Elliott 1978; Tunstall 1971; Walker 2000). Even compulsory union membership is a longer leash than being licensed by a consortium of the Great and Good of the profession and of employers.

Journalism training: from apprentice to undergraduate

It was the 1947-49 Royal Commission (Cmd. 7700 1949) which provided the impetus for the setting up of an industry-wide training scheme in the early 1950s. The National Council for the Training of Journalists was established

by agreement between proprietors, the NUJ and (later) the IoJ to provide and assess entry-level technical skills. Some students studied before taking up employment and others alongside a job; their educational qualifications varied from none to (in a very few cases) a degree, but all courses operated at sub-degree level. The principal employer stakeholder in this training set-up has always been the local/regional press which is both the biggest employer of news journalists and was, until the late twentieth century, the most common route into the national press. Alongside this, there has been limited recruitment directly into specialist posts by national newspapers and in-house training programmes offered by large conglomerates. These have expanded and contracted depending upon the state of the economy[2]. The essential point, however, is that until the1970s almost no journalism training took place in higher education institutions. From the 1970s to the1990s a small number of HE-based courses developed, but all were postgraduate certificates or diplomas.

In 2002 UK news media (if one includes books, magazines and online publishing) employed about 280,000 people in 14,500 firms (Greenslade 2002). Nevertheless, the lack of organization commented upon by the 1949 Royal Commission (Cmd. 7700 1949) persists. Both the Publishing National Training Organisation (2002) and academic researchers (Delano and Henningham 1995) had to apply elaborate search strategies to produce even approximate data on the qualifications of the workforce. One key trend is, however, clear: journalism is becoming graduate-entry. As participation in higher education increases this might be expected, but these new entrants also disproportionately tend to have parents in professional/managerial

employment (Publishing NTO 2002:25) and the majority of them are women. In part this feminization is explained by the relative expansion of the magazine sector, which has always employed a greater proportion of women, but it is also very marked in training for broadcasting. Winston (cited in Richardson 2000) quotably explained this as the 'Samantha syndrome' – capturing a general trend that applies to young men as well. His argument is twofold. First, that work in broadcasting is seen as more respectable, both as a quotidian activity and in terms of public opinion, than any sector of the press. This respectability is important for the students' parents who have, second, become stakeholders because of the lack of financial support for pre-entry journalism training. This applies to courses at further education colleges intended for both graduates and non-graduates, and to higher education-based postgraduate diplomas and degrees. When overhanging undergraduate debts, very poor pay rates in the non-national press, and the widespread demand that would-be journalists demonstrate their talents and tenacity through unpaid work experience are added into the equation, the need for a well-resourced family background is evident.

Alongside this demographic shift, journalism training is mutating because of the financial régime in UK higher education. On the demand side, many young people aspire to work in the burgeoning media industries. Although the financial support of students has become a complex and politicized issue, it is still easier and cheaper to fund an undergraduate degree course than a non-degree or a higher degree. Meanwhile, on the supply side universities' institutional funding is tied to student numbers. Entirely

predictably, *undergraduate* degree courses in journalism are rapidly being set up[3], in the absence of any industry-wide training strategy.

Professional disqualifications

Nearly seventy years on, the IoJ's attempt to make journalism a self-governing licensed profession seems naïve. Even in lay discourse about the professions, achieving the kinds of market protections set out in the draft bill is seen as *confirming* an occupation's status as socially valuable, not as a promissory note. Moreover as the extensive literature on the Anglo-American professions (MacDonald 1995) demonstrates, achieving licensed status requires tenacious campaigning and powerful allies. The IoJ notably failed on both fronts: it seems to have had no friends at all.

The report of the 1977 Royal Commission has a single paragraph on 'Professionalism' which states flatly 'it is not realistic to expect journalism to become a profession in the sense that only people licensed by a national body at national level may practise' (Cmnd. 6810 1977: para.18.3). The specific reason was 'the absence of a common core of knowledge', a main cause also identified by Carr-Saunders and Wilson who, observing that journalism covers many tasks and skills, argue: 'though these are not jobs which any one can do without a considerable amount of experience, no specialized intellectual training is an indispensable preliminary' (1933: 266). Tunstall (1971: 69) makes the same point by quoting Greenwood's (1957) 'five attributes' of a profession – and goes on to suggest that journalism might more realistically aim to become a 'semi-profession'.

Lack of a unique cognitive base is not, however, the only characteristic of journalism used to disqualify it as a current or future profession. Reflecting the contemporary context, the 1947 Royal Commission (Cmd. 7700 1949) pointed to the lack of direct clients, a linked but not identical argument to that of Carr-Saunders and Wilson's description (1933: 266) of the 'factory production' of newspapers – that those participating are employees working in a team answerable to management and proprietor, rather than on their own account.

Nor, continue Carr-Saunders and Wilson, can employees of a commercial press take a 'high and serious view of their duties' (1933:267). In other words they cannot take a stance on the basis that it represents the public interest, unlike Delane's London *Times* of the mid-nineteenth century who 'had no newspaper rivals and therefore no need to fear offending his readers; he never had to consider advertisers, financial interests or millionaire proprietors'. In this they were, of course, invoking the classic functionalist account of the contract between the full-blown professional and society (Parsons 1951).

A weaker form of the same argument has been current in disputes about the status of journalism throughout its history: that a real profession must have a code of ethics. Drawing up such a code for its members was the NUJ's response to the IoJ's proposed Journalists' Registration Council (Christian 1980: 279) but it is in this area that journalists' continuing lack of real autonomy emerges most clearly. The 1947-49 Royal Commission (Cmd. 7700: para.618) observed that 'So far … the Press has not developed the internal organisation necessary for the regulation of its own affairs… Indeed,

the Press has taken fewer steps to safeguard its standards of performance than perhaps any other institution of comparable importance'. Exactly the same point was forcibly made at the hearings of the House of Commons select committee on privacy and media intrusion (Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2003) while the contemporaneous debates on the 2002 Communications Bill included demands that the press should come under the same system of regulation as broadcast news.

Tunstall (1971: 68) also draws attention to another feature associated with established professions: the right and duty of keeping exchanges with clients confidential. Despite its not being explicitly protected by law, 'this privilege is nevertheless usually accorded to doctors and priests'. Although the right to protect sources of information is one of the most prominent and universally shared elements of the occupational value system, journalists and media organizations have always struggled to establish a recognized basis for it. (See, for example, Welsh and Greenwood 2001 ch. 24). There are constant disputes with the security services, courts and police authorities (*Press Gazette passim)* – and now over the powers of the Financial Services Authority (*The Guardian* 13 November 2002).

In quoting Greenwood's (1957) definition of a profession, Tunstall (1971: 69) also endorses the supposition that 'community sanction' or public acceptance is a prerequisite of professional status and, by implication, that journalism did not have that acceptance. In later work his opinion had hardened: 'In the 1960s journalists belonged to an aspiring and gentlemanly occupation with some residue of social deference … By the 1990s … social deference was largely a thing of the past' (1996:136). Even if a handful of

national broadsheet and broadcast journalists enjoy élite status within the occupation and with the public, the majority of those who are actually employed do routine work in national, regional and local newspapers, radio and television. Moreover, he argues, recent industry changes, coupled with the perceived glamour of a media career (for this purpose including advertising, magazines and the internet), mean that supply outstrips demand. Far from becoming more unified, journalism is becoming like acting: with large numbers of 'resting' journalists (1996: ch. 8 *passim*). In this situation, he implies, greater public recognition is unlikely.

Finally there is the question of the nature and locus of education for journalism. In dismissing journalism's professional claims, commentators have not asserted that university-based, degree-level training is an essential characteristic of the traditional profession. Clearly it is not: both branches of English legal practice have arcane systems based in part on a kind of apprenticeship; ordination training in the Church of England is not reserved for graduates, nor does it take place in universities. But few well-established occupations can have a training system that has remained piecemeal, disputed, frequently under-funded, lacking strategic vision, and shaped neither by practitioners nor employers for nearly a hundred years.

Rethinking professionalism: not structures but discourse

From the mid-1930s to the mid-1990s reconfiguring journalism in the UK as a profession appeared to be of little interest to employees and was sporadically resisted by employers. This lack of engagement with the nature of occupational control in journalism was mirrored in academic commentary. The

linking theme of the 'disqualifications' catalogued above is that they are components of an implicit model of the acquisition of recognized professional status encapsulated – and laid to rest – by Johnson (1972) as the 'trait model'. From this perspective, the process is a cumulative and unilinear accretion of public recognition and legal protection indexical of the social value of the occupation.

In the 1970s and 1980s a market closure or neo-Weberian interpretation (Saks 2003) was prominent in Anglo-American sociological research on professions, focused on medicine and law as the archetypal professional groups. Here the model was professionalization as an active project promoted by practitioners in part, at least, in their own occupational interests (Larson 1977). Given the disposition of forces outlined above, this strategy was never operationalized or utilized by journalists themselves and only briefly considered by those commenting on the occupational group (Christian 1980: 270-2). Clearly journalists did not see its relevance and did not campaign for market closure. Entry routes into the occupation remained diverse, uncredentialized and uncertificated.

In the sociology of professions, however, new questions are being asked (Dubar 2000; Evetts 2003; Fournier 1999; Gadea 2003). For example: how is the *discourse* of professionalism being used, not only by workers themselves, but by managers to discipline workers and workforces via mechanisms of occupational identity and *self*-control.

The discourse of professionalism is now used as a marketing slogan in advertising to appeal to customers (Fournier 1999), in recruitment campaigns and in company mission statements, in organizational aims and objectives to

motivate employees, and has also entered the managerial literature and been embodied in training manuals. It is attractive for workers to perceive themselves as professionals: here the discourse is being used as a framework of occupational and self-identity which could be interpreted as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990). It is a discourse of self-control, even self-belief, an occupational badge or marker which gives meaning to the work and enables workers to justify and emphasise the importance of their work to themselves and others. At the same time, it is an ideology which enables not only self-control but self-exploitation. Born (1995) illustrates this vividly in her account of the world of French contemporary music practice. Once self-defined as a professional artist, imposing limits on one's efforts or time are rendered illegitimate. The discourse of professionalism is also claimed by both sides in disputes and political and policy arguments, sometimes about salary demands, but particularly in respect of proposals to change funding, organizational and administrative arrangements as Crompton (1990) demonstrates in relation to health and education. For a 'professional', axiomatically the needs of patients, clients and students are (or can be invoked as) superordinate.

Professionalism as a discourse of self-control and motivation crucially depends on effective mechanisms of occupational socialization and identity formation and maintenance – Foucault's (1979) process of 'normalization'. At the structural level professional training has traditionally been defended as an induction into an occupational community which will police behaviour via the practitioner's desire not to lose good opinion by excessive greed or abuse of power. Such a model may be deeply problematic, as numerous critical writers

have observed, but symbolically it remains very powerful and continues to explain the appeal of professionalism at the occupational level.

Employers, managers and supervisors are also mobilising the discourse of professionalism *unilaterally* and instrumentally. High professional standards are required, but need to be achieved in others by a combination of individualized forms of self-control and organizational, hierarchical supervision, checking and correction. Occupational change is often presented as the need to 'professionalize' the workers concerned through increased occupational training and/or education (often in universities) and certainly in the credentialization of workers (Collins 1979, 1981). Such transformations involve major changes in work practices and routines, and often technology as well. An occupational identity crisis may follow, emerging as discontent particularly on the part of older and more experienced groups of workers.

At the level of individual actors the concept of normalization of the citizen-subject was also a central requirement in Foucault's argument since legitimate political power depended on the obedience of subjects. Foucault's later work on the penal system and of the regulation of sexuality highlighted the way in which outright coercion has given way to normalization. The discipline of selves has become self-discipline, where the key controls are internalized and proactive rather than external and reactive.

This process can also be observed in studies of occupational socialization and the formation, through vocational training and occupational experience, of an occupational identity. Such an occupational identity which gives individuals a sense of self and strongly influences and affects

occupational and indeed other behaviours. The community of fellow workers and the hierarchies of positions in organizations and other work places (such as peers, superiors and juniors) constantly reiterate and reinforce this sense of self and position as well as appropriate behaviours and work decisions and choices. The discourse of professionalism is a part of this sense of self in work and professional practice socialization.

These processes of occupational identity 'formation' apply in all kinds of work but are especially important in élite positions in commercial, industrial, service and political organizations. In sequences and stages, individuals are prepared and prepare themselves. They make judicious decisions, choose correct behaviours (explained in appropriate discourses) perform according to the expectations of superiors and some are then rewarded with career progress and senior occupational positions. As Fournier (1998) and Grey (1994) suggest, careers should be understood as involving self-management and self-motivation.

The effectiveness of this mode of occupational reproduction and identity reinforcement has tended to make occupational change difficult to accomplish – and indeed much of the theoretical work on professional identities has focused on the structures and processes which deliver continuity and stability. What is currently missing from the professions literature is an analysis of potential motors of occupational change. We argue that recent developments in news journalism demonstrate the discourse of professionalism is being used in just this way.

An American excursus

Journalists in the UK often seem to be envious of their colleagues in the United States, 'many of whom consider themselves part of a secular priesthood and behave with a pomposity and grandeur alien to their British counterparts' (*The Times* 20 September 2002). There journalism appears to have it all: highly organized, well-established training and public esteem both crowned and underpinned by constitutional protection. American academic commentators take a more sceptical view. Even the special position claimed under the Constitution is, according to Carey (2000: 13) 'a particular interpretation of the First Amendment as the steady advance of a Free Press under the wise guidance of the Supreme Court'.

If the constitutional argument is not quite as definitive as is believed, what about the education of journalists? There has been journalism training in US universities since the late nineteenth century (Reese and Cohen 2000). In 1908, the first dedicated school was set up at Missouri. That at Columbia (now exclusively postgraduate and arguably the most famous and highly esteemed in the world) was founded in 1912 (Carey 2000; Reese and Cohen 2000). Here, too, the situation is more ambiguous than first it appears. Carey reports that the initial, undergraduate, programme went to what was then Columbia College because Harvard had rejected the offer by its benefactor, Joseph Pulitzer (of the eponymous prize). Many of the early training courses were based in 'the great land grant universities of the middle west' and were the outcome of lobbying by the local state press associations, 'made up of small and medium-sized daily newspapers seeking enhanced prestige for their humble enterprises' (Carey 2000:19)[4]. If the host universities did not

enjoy high status, neither did journalism education within them, despite the consistent pattern of trying to buttress the vocational content with elements of the liberal arts (Carey 2000:22).

Nor does journalism in the US seem to have succeeded in finding the elusive distinctive cognitive base. 'The curriculum attempted to duplicate the atmospherics of a newspaper and education was largely an old-fashioned apprenticeship' (Carey 2000:13). Very similar, in other words, to the style of UK training in further education and in-house courses outlined above.

In structural terms, too, US journalism is closer to that in the UK than conventional wisdoms assert. The relationship between reporter and source enjoys special legal protection in only some states. Perhaps most tellingly, journalism in the US is unlicensed, just as it is in the UK.

Carey goes on to argue that during the latter half of the twentieth century, journalism education has become *less* like his conception of the enterprise, as it has become linked to 'the new science of communication … A science of control' (2000:20). Paradoxically, that Carey can lament in this way indicates the key respect in which the profession of journalism in the US really *is* wholly different from that in the UK: its cultural location. Soloski's (1989) well-known discussion of US news professionalism opens: 'The romantic vision of journalism is that of a crusading reporter who, much to the consternation of a cantankerous but benevolent editor, takes on one of the more villainous politicians in the city … and betters the lives of the downtrodden and helpless.' Of course Soloski is talking about occupational myths, but he is also talking about their internalization while becoming a journalist and their expression in day-to-day behaviour. Moreover, this myth

is shared with the US public, providing journalism with a very powerful stock of social capital, identified by Abbott (1988) as the cultural work necessary for professionalization. Here popular culture provides a robust index: reporter-as-hero is an enduring figure in American novels and cinema.

Journalism's standing as a profession in north America is, then, not a matter of legal protections and institutional forms. It is a *discourse* shared and nourished by practitioners, employers and public. As we shall see, this opens up the possibility for a radical reinterpretation of journalism's occupational standing in the contemporary UK.

The convenient polyvalence of 'profession' in UK journalism

In UK English usage, being 'professional' is not one, but a cluster of related concepts. Like other similar terms – notably and classically 'community' – this polyvalence provides operating space in which parties to large-scale occupational and organizational change can pursue multiple, perhaps opposed, goals without fully acknowledging what is happening.

Despite the rejection of 'professional' styles of collective occupational control, being 'professional' is a prominent component of news journalists' occupational ideology. The pivot is applying the canons of 'objectivity': the separation of news and comment; of 'facts' and value-infused commentary. Much of the most penetrating sociological writing about journalism has been directed at how this unsustainable distinction was generated and is sustained. (See, for example, Chalaby 1998; Schudson 1978; Soloski 1989; Tuchman 1972.) In occupational talk, 'objectivity' reveals a further multiplication of meanings. The traditional principled claim is that good journalism is the

disinterested search for, and weighing of evidence, acting in the interests of the public in just the same way that the doctor acts in the interest of the patient, rather than the drug company or waiting list target. But it can also indicate a moral and emotional detachment from the topics and subjects of news. This more debased meaning frequently surfaces in autobiographies and hagiographies, both extensive genres, and particularly in relation to press journalism (Aldridge 1998; *British Journalism Review passim*). Since the development of the mass press, UK national newspapers have consistently been highly politicized, mostly in support of right of centre policies and parties. Despite the rhetoric of objectivity (and to the bemusement of colleagues from Europe and north America) not only their selection but their inflection and presentation of news reflects this. Left-inclined journalists, whether new entrant or editor, who want to work on a national title therefore face a dilemma. 'Professionalism' is the alchemy, justifying the separation of producer from product.

Not only is high value placed on the capacity to produce what is needed, regardless of one's personal values, but there is a powerful occupational belief that the mission of 'getting the news' can justify dubious methods. One of the most quoted and anthologized reflections on the qualities needed for successful journalism includes 'ratlike cunning' (Tomalin 1969) – this from a highly educated man working for a high status newspaper.

Over the last twenty years the job of news journalist, whether in a small local weekly paper or on a national daily broadsheet or in broadcast news has undergone fundamental change, yet there has been relatively little resistance. Union de-recognition (Gall 1998; Majoribanks 2000) does not provide a

complete explanation. The discursive privileging of ends over means, coupled with the construction of the job as a vocation (Aldridge 2001b) has provided managements with vital room for manoeuvre.

As in many industrial sectors the overarching motif has been intensification. In all news media, more news is being produced by the same number of people, whether it is for 24-hour rolling television bulletins or multi-section newspapers. Tunstall (1996:136) suggests that by the mid-1990s national newspaper journalists were producing between two and three times the output required of colleagues in the 1960s. Before the mid-1990s the ownership of local and regional newspapers was widely spread between large and medium sized groups and single families. Now the market is dominated by four groups. For the new corporate owners, part of the attraction is the potential for reducing staffing levels while holding advertising revenues - in which papers like the *Loughborough Echo* or *Leicester Mercury* have a local monopoly - constant (Franklin and Murphy 1998; www.newspapersoc.org.uk). The only other local news medium in the UK is radio, which is notorious for its understaffing (Crook 1998).

The other facet of intensification has been ‘multi-skilling’ facilitated by digital technology. In the regional press, for example, reporters are ‘entering’ (ie sub-editing) their own stories while in some newspaper groups the overall design of pages is being pooled at regional 'hubs’ responsible for several papers. Being your own photographer is also taking hold. Reporters in broadcast news are being asked to produce several versions of reports for both radio and television and, in some cases, are supplying the video images to accompany them (*Press Gazette* 20 December 2002*)*.

Stretched staff resources combined with electronic technology have also dramatically increased management surveillance. Newsrooms are open-plan, so reporters have always been under the eye of middle-managers. Now, however, they spend much less time out of the office and more speaking to news sources or gathering background material by 'phone. National specialist correspondents increasingly use internet-based material. Not only are journalists physically visible, but their stories are accessible online to senior staff while they write. Moreover this is an utterly performative environment: everyone accepts the truth of the cliché that you are 'only as good as your last story'.

This quiet, carpeted Foucauldian panopticon is a long way from the noisy comings and goings of recent historical reality and continuing occupational mythology. As professional story tellers it is hardly surprising that journalists have an unusually elaborate and frequently paraded occupational belief system in which rugged individualism, frightening but charismatic editors, and outrageous behaviour are central themes. Indeed we have argued elsewhere (Aldridge 1998) that this self-image as autonomous, insouciant – even mildly deviant – is clung to and embellished precisely *because* the work is increasingly routine and constrained. And journalism is an intensely reflexive occupation which constantly talks to and about itself. Apart from the compulsive consumption of competitors' output, there is an increasing volume of media industry news in trade magazines and national newspapers themselves. Taken together with the reminiscence that is a staple of *British Journalism Review* and the constant supply of autobiography there is plenty to sustain the occupational culture.

An unusually romantic and self-referential world could mean that journalists have simply (and grudgingly) incorporated their new tools and techniques into their craft-style construction of the job. However, occupational culture will soon, we suggest, be disturbed by changing demography and unplanned shifts in the pattern of training described above – and that change is likely to be swift in a young workforce with high churn (Publishing NTO 2002: 21).

Even if the training (like the early US programmes referred to earlier) emphasises the experiential and practical and is taught by ex-practitioners, and despite their current status at the academic margin, the emergence of journalism degrees in the UK is an important structural marker of the occupation's slide towards respectability. At the level of the actor, it is hard to imagine a graduate workforce identifying with the traditional posture of the journalist as social outsider. Already survey data are showing an ontological shift facilitated by the polyvalence discussed above: many journalists now regard themselves not merely as 'being professional' but as being a member of a profession. In 1994 Delano and Henningham (1995:9) asked UK journalists to characterize their occupation: 51 per cent of respondents chose 'profession', compared with 16 per cent for 'craft' and 10 per cent for 'trade'[5]. Moreover, 63 per cent said that they 'deserve a social status at least equivalent' to solicitors (Delano and Henningham 1995:10). Whether or not this is reflected in contemporary public opinion, it certainly suggests an aspiration to mainstream respectability.

Concluding discussion: from vagabonds to clerks

For Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) to be a professional was to serve the public interest. As Parsons later (1951) expressed it in more theoretically sophisticated terms, the institutional forms of the Anglo-American professions embodied an implicit contract. High status, material reward and occupational self-government were both necessary and legitimate motivators for the acquisition of the highly specialized and hard-earned knowledge required to carry out responsible, arcane, risky and socially necessary work. Even before the sociological deconstruction of professional claims as primarily self-interested led by Larson (1977), it was a taken for granted assumption that the achievement of professional standing and structures was more to the advantage of the practitioner than to any employer. Much of the sociological debate in the 1960s and early 1970s centred on the nature of the potentially conflictual interface between the bureaucratically organized workplace and the relative independence of professionally organized workers. Nevertheless, there was an implicit assumption of shared ultimate goals.

Today most 'professionals' work in large organizations for a salary. But this transformation, we argue, is less significant than the mobilization of concepts of professional values and self-identity by employers in pursuit of organizational goals which are *not* necessarily supported by their employees. This possibility of a flexible and 'transorganizational' control mechanism was prefigured in a classic 1989 paper by Soloski describing US press journalism. 'Since the norms of news professionalism are shared by all journalists, the news organization can concentrate on teaching journalists its own news policies.' However, disagreements about news policy were few and usually

resolved by the editor then, as now (and in the UK), the crucial mediator between the newspaper as creative enterprise and commercial business. Those were, however, more spacious days. Even in north America, media are facing UK-style 'supercompetition' (Aldridge 2001a; Tunstall 1996) and the hallowed traditions of editorial independence are being attacked. 'Some of the biggest editors in the business have quit rather than make budget cuts that they felt would devastate editorial' (Hickey 1998 pt 2).

Journalism which, in the UK, has for a century been indifferent to the structures of conventional professions (however modelled) and occupies unusually ambiguous cultural terrain, would seem an unlikely exemplar of the contemporary meaning of professionalism. Nevertheless the very vigour of its occupational mythology, including an iconic individualism which, we have argued elsewhere (Aldridge 2001b), can produce a certain naïvety about change at the structural level, has allowed it to be seduced. The operational meaning of being 'professional' opened up spaces for radical change in what the job is, what it ought to be and how it is done. Moreover, the changing social composition of the workforce is likely to normalize this accidental respectability and will legitimate and reinforce aspirations to mainstream middle class status. In this new world, real or constructed social marginality has gone the same way as eyeshades, inky fingers and carbon paper.

Notes

1. The remit of an intervening Royal Commission was limited to 'the economic and financial factors affecting the production and sale of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals in the United Kingdom' (Cmnd.1812 1962:3).

2. Until 1955 the BBC had a monopoly on broadcast news in the UK. It has always undertaken most of its training internally, but has also recruited journalists from newspapers. When commercial television was established, it recruited journalists from the BBC and the press (Cmnd. 6810 1977: para 18.4-6 and Appendix G). This demand contributed to the greatly improved pay and conditions of journalists during the 1960s and 1970s commented upon by Tunstall (1996) and others. For more details on broadcast journalism see Crook (1978) and Schlesinger (1987[1978]). For details of the complexities of contemporary journalism training see Keeble (2001) and the National Council for the Training of Journalists' website <www.nctj.com>.

3. For the current distribution of such courses, see *Press Gazette*'s annual training supplement and the National Council for the Training of Journalists' website <www.nctj.com>.

4. Until very recently neither the US nor Canada had anything resembling a national press. Electronic remote printing has solved the distribution

problem, but the principal papers are still versions of essentially regional newspapers like the *New York Times* and Toronto *Globe and Mail*. Television and radio are the media with truly national reach, to the extent that broadcasting is seen as a key element in building Canada's nationhood (Aldridge 2001a).

5. Unfortunately one of the choices was 'vocation' (21 per cent), introducing a category problem which makes the outcome less clear cut.

Bibliography

Abbott, A. 1988 *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labour*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aldridge, M. 1998 'The Tentative Hell-raisers: Identity and Mythology in Contemporary UK Press Journalism'. *Media, Culture and Society,* 20:109--28.

————– 2001a 'Lost Expectations? Women Journalists and the Fall-out from the "Toronto Newspaper War"', *Media, Culture and Society*, 23: 607-624.

_____ 2001b 'The Paradigm Contingent Career? Women in Regional Newspaper Journalism', *Sociological Research Online*, (6) 3 < http:// www.socresonline.org.uk/6/3/aldridge.html>

Annandale, E. 1998 *The Sociology of Health and Medicine*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Born, G. 1995 *Rationalizing Culture; IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1990 *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage.

Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller. P. eds. 1991 *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Burrage, M. and Torstendahl, R. eds. 1990 *Professions in Theory and History: Rethinking the Study of the Professions*, London: Sage.

Carey, J. W. 2000 'Some Personal Notes on US Journalism Education', *Journalism, Theory Practice and Criticism*, 1(1):12-23.

Carr-Saunders, A.M. and Wilson, P.A. 1933 *The Professions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Chalaby, J. 1998 *The Invention of Journalism*, Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan.

Christian, H. 1980 'Journalists' Occupational Ideology and Press Commercialisation' in H. Christian (ed.) 'The Sociology of Journalism and the Press, *Sociological Review Monograph 29*, Keele. Staffs: University of Keele.

Cmd. 7700 1949 *Royal Commission on the Press 1947-49 – Report*, London: HMSO.

Cmnd. 1812 1962 *Royal Commission on the Press 1961-62 – Report and Evidence,* London: HMSO

Cmnd. 6810 1977 *Royal Commission on the Press – Final Report*, London: HMSO.

Collins, R. 1979 *The Credential Society*, Orlando, Florida: Academic Press.

_____ 1981 'Crises and Declines in Credential Systems', in *Sociology Since Midcentury: Essays in Theory Cumulation*, New York: Academic Press.

Crompton, R. 1990 'Professions in the Current Context', *Work, Employment and Society*, Special Issue: 147-66.

Crook, T. 1998 *International Radio Journalism; History, Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge.

Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2003 *Privacy and Media Intrusion, Vol. 1 – Report HC458-1*, London: The Stationery Office and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmcumeds/458/>

Delano, A. and Henningham, J. 1995 *The News Breed; British Journalism in the 1990s*, London: London Institute.

Dubar, C. 2000 *La Crise des Identités: l'interprétation d'une Mutation*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Durkheim, E. 1992 *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, London: Routledge (originally given as lectures 1890-1912; first published in English 1957).

Elliott, P. 1978 'Professional Ideology and Organisational Change: the Journalist since 1800' in G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (eds) *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, London: Constable.

Evetts, J. forthcoming 2003 'The Sociology of Professional Groups: New Questions and Different Explanations', *Knowledge, Work & Society* 1(1).

Foucault, M. 1979 'Governmentality', *Ideology and Consciousness*, 6: 5-21.

Fournier, V. 1998 'Stories of Development and Exploitation: Militant Voices in an Enterprise Culture', *Organization* 5 (1): 55-80.

_____ 1999 'The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism', *Social Review* 47 (2):280-307.

Franklin, B. and Murphy, D. 1998 'Changing Times: Local Newspapers, Technology and Markets' in B. Franklin and D. Murphy (eds) *Making the Local News*, London: Routledge.

Freidson, E. 1994 *Professionalism Reborn: Theory, Prophecy and Policy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

_____ 2001 *Professionalism: The Third Logic*, London: Polity.

Gadea, C. forthcoming 2003 'Sociologie des Cadres et Sociologie des Professions: Proximités et Paradoxes', *Knowledge, Work & Society* 1(1).

Gall, G. 1998 'Industrial Relations and the Local Press: the Continuing Employers' Offensive' in B. Franklin and D. Murphy (eds) *Making the Local News*, London: Routledge.

Greenslade, R. 2002 'Class War', *The Guardian 3 December.*

Greenwood, E. 1957 'Attributes of a Profession', *Social Work*, 2, July: 44-55.

Grey, C. 1994 'Career as a Project of the Self and Labour Process Discipline', *Sociology* 28: 478-7.

Hickey, N. 1998 'Money Lust: How Pressure for Profit is Perverting Journalism' (in six parts), *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August, <www.cjr.com.>

Johnson, T. 1972 *Professions and Power*, London: Macmillan.

Keeble, R. 2001 *The Newspapers Handbook* (third edition), London: Routledge.

Larson, M.S. 1977 *The Rise of Professionalism*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Lee, A. J. 1976 *The Origins of the Popular Press 1855-1914*, London: Croom Helm.

MacDonald, K.M. 1995 *The Sociology of the Professions*, London: Sage.

McManus, J. 1994 *Market-driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Majoribanks, T. 2000 *News Corporation, Technology and the Workplace: Global Strategies, Local Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marshall, T.H. 1950 *Citizenship and Social Class and other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, P. and Rose, N. 1990 'Governing Economic Life', *Economy and Society* 19(1): 1-31.

Parsons, T. 1951 *The Social System*, New York: The Free Press.

Publishing National Training Organization 2002 *Journalists at Work: Their Views on Training, Recruitment and Conditions*, London: Publishing NTO/Skillset.

Reese, S. and Cohen, J. 2000 'Education for Journalism: the Profession of Scholarship', *Journalism Studies* 1(2): 213-28.

Royal Commission on the Press 1947 *Memoranda of Evidence 2: The Institute of Journalists*, London: HMSO.

Saks, M. forthcoming 2003 'The Limitations of the Anglo-American Sociology of the Professions : A Critique of the Current Neo-Weberian Orthodoxy', *Knowledge, Work & Society* 1(1).

Schlesinger, P. 1987 *Putting 'Reality' Together*, London: Methuen [first published London: Constable 1978].

Schudson, M. 1978 *Discovering the News; A Social History of American Newspapers*, New York: Basic Books.

_____ 1995 *The Power of News*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

Smith, A. 1978 'The Long Road to Objectivity and Back Again: the Kinds of Truth We Get in Journalism' in G, Boyce, J, Curran and P, Wingate (eds) *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, London: Constable.

Soloski, J. 1989 'News Reporting and Professionalism: Some Constraints on the Reporting of the News', *Media, Culture and Society*, 11(2): 207-28.

Tawney, R.H. (1921) *The Acquisitive Society*, New York: Harcourt Bruce.

Tomalin, N. (1969) 'Stop the Press, I Want to Get On', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 26 October.

Tuchman, G. 1972 'Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity', *American Journal of Sociology*, 77 (4):660-79.

Tunstall, J. 1971 *Journalists at Work, Specialist Correspondents: Their News Organizations, Sources and Competitor-colleagues*, London: Constable.

———— 1996 *Newspaper Power; The New National Press in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walker, D. 2000 'Newspaper Power: a Practitioner's Account' in H. Tumber (ed.) *Media Power, Professionals and Policies*, London: Routledge.

Welsh, T. and Greenwood, W. 2001 *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists 16th Edition*, London: Butterworths.