

References

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Claudia Mellado, Leo Hellmueller, and Wolfgang Donsbach
Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts, and Methods. New York: Routledge, 2017, 263 pp. £115. ISBN: 978-1-138-78301-0 (hbk).

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DOI: 10.1177/1940161218771898

Relations between ideals and realities, between norms and practices, are enduring sources of tension and conflict in personal conduct and social organization—and now in journalism and its study apparently! For the latter, a key focus has been journalists' roles, which for many years in many countries was primarily researched in its normative aspect by surveys of journalists (most recently in the Worlds of Journalism study, Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2017). Thanks to Claudia Mellado and her colleagues, however, academic attention has been shifting to the interplay, including potential gaps, between journalists' roles regarded as normatively desirable and those performed daily on the job.

This book is an indispensable read for anyone seeking insight into this interplay or intending to mount research into it. It is full of ideas about it, approaches to it, typologies of it, citations of relevant literatures concerning it, and international perspectives on it. It is also sensibly structured in three parts: conceptualizing, contextualizing, and methodologically tackling journalistic role performance.

With no weak contributions, many of the individual chapters were highlights for me. First and foremost among them was Dan Hallin's Preface, which provides a remarkably clear—and full in just a few pages—overview of the concept of journalists' role performance from a range of angles, underlining its deeper significance for issues of structure and agency, culture, and political economy. Tim P. Voss discusses how the perception and performance of journalists' roles has been historically constructed, focusing on their coupling, historical arc and granularity. Henrik Ornebring explores the tensions between journalists' epistemological beliefs (e.g., about "facts" and objectivity) and their epistemic practices (e.g., verification), which are "more

honored in the breach than in the observance.” Martin Eide looks at role performance through the lens of normative theory, referring especially to pragmatism, skepticism, and professional suspicion within the notion of a social contract between journalism and society. Mellado and Vos consider the applicability (or otherwise) of a typology of six roles (disseminator, watchdog, political facilitator, audience service, infotainment, and civic) across different kinds of news platforms (press, television, radio, and online). David Ryfe explores journalistic roles through practice theory, centering on “news routines” regarded as “social practices that organize and lend meaning to news production and performance.” Based on the concept of “institutional logics,” Wilson Lowery maintains that the disconnection between role conceptions and enactments arises from the exposure of journalists to multiple logics, requiring them to “serve multiple masters.” Silvio Waisbord questions the possibility of generalizing about the gap between professional ethics and performance from academic research into journalistic practice outside the Western world.

The undoubted value of all that appreciated, this book suffers from a major limitation: the absence of a considered editorial conclusion. Where do the editors think we should go from here? Amid the tremendously rich variety of ways in which norm-practice relations can be analyzed, what next research steps would they recommend? Where do they stand on some of the opposed positions taken by contributors to the volume—such as the methodological individualism advocated by van Dalen, de Vreese, and Albaek as against van Hout and de Smedt’s espousal of discourse analysis and Waisbord’s recommendation of “situated ethics” analysis? Do they envisage merely *miscellaneous* approaches to theory and research on journalistic role performance or one that is more progressively developmental? One would have welcomed ideas for proceeding in the latter spirit. How about assembling a team of scholars to examine the same case from different perspectives? How about mounting one or more selective cross-nationally comparative investigations, fielded in sites chosen for their explanatory potential to reveal (or disconfirm) expected systemic differences? What about studies of how the norm-practice gap is being regulated (to different degrees and in what ways) in different media systems? On that level, the editors seem silent.

Reference

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