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How ethnic media producers constitute their communities of practice: An ecological approach¹

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Abstract

Almost 60 million Americans regularly get their news and other information from ethnically targeted television, radio, newspapers, and websites (Allen, 2009). However, there is little research on ethnic media producers. Data collected in group discussions with media producers serving a variety of immigrant populations in Los Angeles were analyzed to investigate how they negotiate and develop their professional identities. Husband's (2005) work on ethnic media newsrooms as communities of practice provided an explanatory framework for how respondents managed professional constraints resulting from their managers' priorities and limited institutional resources. Moreover, though, we found that respondents were deeply influenced by ecological forces beyond their workplaces – specifically, by their encounters with mainstream media producers and organizations, mainstream society institutions, and the ethnic communities they serve. How respondents negotiated challenges to their professional identities sheds light on changes in the US media landscape and civil society.

Keywords

Communities of practice, ethnic media, immigration, mainstream media, media ecology, media organizations, professional identity, professionalization, race/ethnicity

Ethnic media, which we define as media created for (and generally by) immigrants, ethnic and language minority groups, and indigenous populations, are growing in size, audience,

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and visibility worldwide, as well as in the United States (Matsaganis et al., 2011). The National Directory of Ethnic Media currently contains information on over 3000 ethnic media organizations in the USA (New America Media, 2012). A 2009 study indicated that nearly 60 million Americans regularly get their news and other information from ethnically targeted television, radio, newspapers, and websites; that figure was 16 percent lower just four years earlier (Allen, 2009). These data suggest that increased demographic diversity in the USA is attended by increased diversity in the media landscape as well.

To date, research on ethnic media has been limited and focused primarily on audiences. Little is known about ethnic media producers (cf. Cottle, 2000; Husband, 2005; Subervi, 2004). Addressing this gap in the literature is critical to better understanding journalists serving diverse communities. Studying ethnic media production also contributes to research on media production more broadly (Husband, 2005), since ethnic media *are* the media for millions of people in the USA and elsewhere.

Our goal is to help fill this gap, by exploring how ethnic media producers negotiate their professional identity development within their communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and by identifying the major factors influencing that development. Communities of practice are collectives bound by common goals and shared identity, developed through participatory learning of core practices (Burkitt et al., 2001; Castañeda et al., 2008). Husband (2005) extended earlier work on communities of practice when he applied this conceptual framework to the experiences of ethnic media producers. In this piece, we apply Husband's framework to a specific geographic context and extend it by accounting for environmental influences on professional identity development, which are beyond the ethnic media newsroom itself: specifically, ethnic media professionals' relationships with mainstream media, mainstream society institutions, and the communities they serve. In doing so, we hope to contribute to developing grounded theory that can guide future research in this area.

In our analyses, we juxtapose ethnic media with mainstream media. We employ Alba and Nee's (2003) definition of 'mainstream' as referring to the segments of society wherein one's life conditions and prospects for social mobility are not limited by ethnic, racial, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. We therefore define media that produce content about and for the mainstream as 'mainstream media'. While the mainstream always includes a society's ethnic majority, other groups negotiate the boundaries of the mainstream over time. For example, high intermarriage rates among couples of European and Asian origins have been a social force for expanding the US mainstream in recent decades (Alba and Nee, 2003). We favor the term 'mainstream' over 'ethnic majority' media because we acknowledge, first and foremost, that there are many places where ethnic 'minorities' now constitute more than 50 percent of the population. Second, we recognize that mainstream media and ethnic media consumers are not necessarily mutually exclusive populations. Rather, we find that ethnic and mainstream media are more likely to coexist in the spectrum of communication resources consumers connect with in their everyday lives (Wilkin et al., 2007).

We begin with a brief introduction to the media professionals who work in ethnic media organizations in the USA, before moving into our analyses of their communities of practice. We conclude with a discussion of the implications our findings have for future research.

Identifying ethnic media journalists, editors, and staff

The overwhelming majority of ethnic media are small organizations, many of which do not operate as profit-making enterprises (Riggins, 1992). As such, most ethnic media rely heavily on volunteers and low-paid staff willing to put in long hours to gather information and produce stories (Browne, 2005: 182; Subervi, 2004).

Ethnic media newsrooms are comprised of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds and motivations. Some have been formally trained as journalists and view working for ethnic media as a stepping stone to a career in mainstream media. Others have left a career in mainstream media, or continue to work for a mainstream outlet while also contributing to ethnically targeted print, broadcast, or online content (Akst, 2003; Matsaganis et al., 2011).

It is also common for ethnic media staff to enter this field after many years in other careers. For some, ethnic media are venues where their linguistic and cultural skillsets are more valuable than in other US occupational niches. Others may see an economic opportunity in filling a gap in their community's media landscape. This choice is most likely in areas where the community is large enough to sustain an ethnic enclave economy (Light et al., 1994; Portes, 1987; Zhou and Logan, 1989); that is, employment sectors where businesses are owned by co-ethnic entrepreneurs (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991). Still others have previously been consumers who felt they had something to contribute as producers.

These wide-ranging motivations are similar to those found in community media newsrooms; that is, media serving members of geographically defined, local communities (Howley, 2005; Jankowski and Prehn, 2002; Kaniss, 1991). Since a large proportion of ethnic media serve geographically limited areas, some ethnic media could also be defined as community media. In general, however, ethnic media serve a more complex set of functions for their audiences than community media, as their local focus intertwines with serving as a forum for concerns specific to new immigrant and linguistic, ethnic, and racial minority communities unlikely to be covered by mainstream media outlets of any size. In this article, we have limited our focus to ethnic media professionals serving immigrant communities, because the concerns of new immigrant and minority communities will differ from each other. The former face challenges related to migration, settlement, and orientation, which are not shared by long-established minority communities (Adoni et al., 2006; Bailey et al., 2007; Elias, 2008).

Ethnic media as communities of practice

Husband (2005) views ethnic media newsrooms as communities of practice shaped by forces at both individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, Husband differentiates between 'inclusive' and 'specialist' dimensions of professional identity. The inclusive dimension encompasses the traits ethnic media producers share with colleagues working in both ethnic and mainstream media, such as the belief that journalists must protect sources by not revealing them to authorities. This dimension exists in tension with the specialist dimension of professional identity, which refers to standards specific to particular forms of journalism (e.g. sports or business reporting); these may differ

from or conflict with inclusive beliefs and practices. Here, we examine how and why respondents experienced tensions between the specialist identities they espoused as ethnic media producers and the inclusive dimensions of their professional identities which they negotiated with their mainstream counterparts.

Individuals develop their inclusive and specialist identities when newcomers and existing members of a community of practice share and negotiate professional norms, routines, and forms of knowledge with each other. Existing members contribute to stability of community standards over time; new members can shape the evolution of communities of practice by contributing different viewpoints, knowledge, and experiences to the newsroom. Communities of practice do not, however, emerge solely through interpersonal communication among their members. Burkitt et al.'s (2001) findings from workplace settings in Britain suggest that individual-level negotiations interact with institutional characteristics to develop localized communities of practice.

At the institutional level, communities of practice are shaped by the 'managerial ideologies' of editors and other gatekeepers on one hand, and institutional routines, resources, and structures on the other. The former refers to the values and priorities of individual managers, whose decisions shape the routines by which stories are assigned, produced, edited, and disseminated. Managerial ideologies also influence what kinds of knowledge, norms, and activities are valued in the newsroom as standards of professional practice.

Individual managers' ideologies are in tension with established production routines, institutional resources, and the structure of the media organization itself. A hierarchical organizational structure, for instance, will circumscribe the influence of an editor differently from a 'flatter' structure (Husband, 2005). Organizational structure also influences how much discretion editors have to allocate resources (e.g. human resources and capital) in accordance with their managerial ideologies. These institutional influences therefore also contribute to the professional identity development of ethnic media journalists. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the institutional and individual subjective forces influencing professional identity development in communities of practice, as described by Husband (2005) and Burkitt et al. (2001).

While Husband's framework (2005) guides our analyses, our prior research in immigrant and ethnic communities guides us in extending his formulation to also account for major influences on these communities of practice, beyond the boundaries of the ethnic media organization itself (Matsaganis et al., 2011). Our findings, presented here, indicate that ethnic media professionals' identities are also influenced by interactions with mainstream media organizations and professionals, mainstream society institutions, and the ethnic communities that they serve. This expanded, ecological model of community of practice emergence is illustrated in Figure 2. It is an ecological model in that it acknowledges that ethnic media organizations do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are integral components of a larger social system (Ball-Rokeach, 1998; Katz et al., 2012; Park, 1922).

Methods

Data were collected from three group meetings with ethnic media professionals working for organizations in the Greater Los Angeles region: two focus groups convened by the authors in 2007 and 2008, and a roundtable forum convened in 2008 by New America

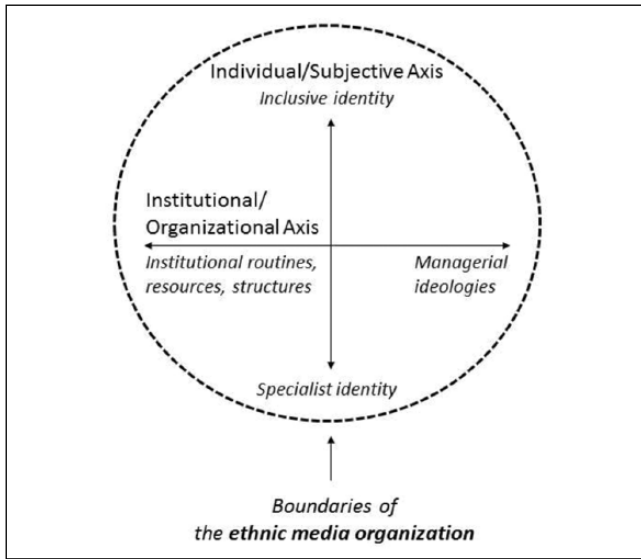


Figure 1. Dimensions of professional identity in ethnic media conceptualized as communities of practice. Model adapted from Husband (2005) and Burkitt et al. (2001).

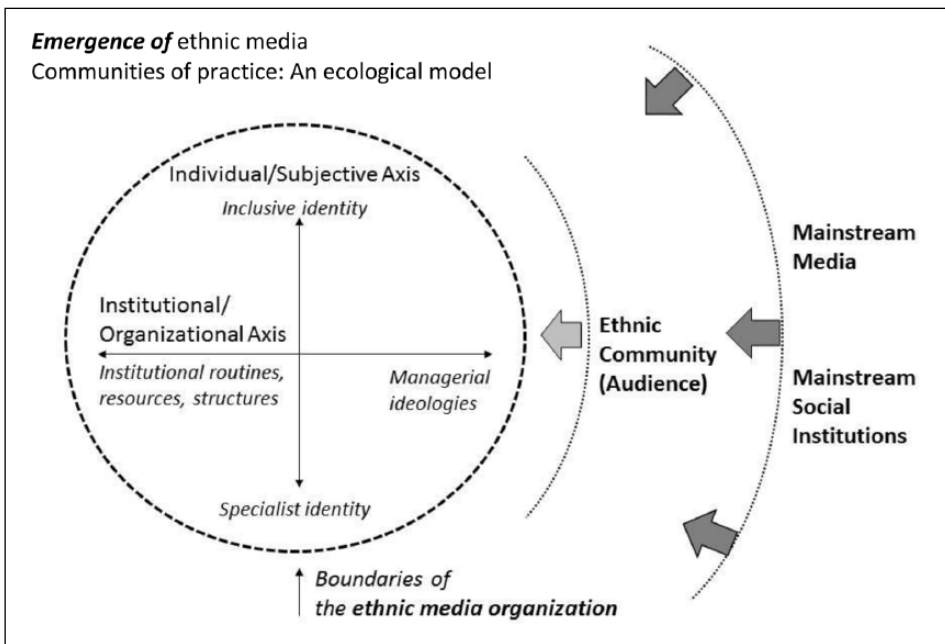


Figure 2. Ethnic media communities of practice are shaped by their relationships to the ethnic communities they serve, to mainstream media organizations, as well as to other mainstream social institutions.

Media (NAM), a nationwide association of ethnic media outlets. Focus group-style discussions were selected as the methodology because the authors wished to capture interactions among participants (Kitzinger, 1995). These interactions encouraged producers serving diverse communities to respond to each other's viewpoints and experiences. In the process, they engaged each other about similarities and differences in their professional histories that would not have been captured, for example, in one-on-one interviews.

Research design

The goal of all three discussions was to document how ethnic media producers defined their professional identities, the missions of their organizations, and what they identified as major influences on their abilities to enact their professional identities and goals. Questions developed to facilitate discussion of these issues guided the first focus group meeting in August 2007. Those data informed the focus of the roundtable forum NAM convened in April 2008 to discuss challenges that can emerge in the relationships between ethnic media producers and the communities they serve.

A second focus group was convened by the authors in May 2008 to ascertain whether the challenges respondents had identified in the two previous meetings, with regard to their relationships with mainstream media colleagues, public figures and institutions, and their own audiences, were also experienced by producers serving communities which had not yet been represented in discussions. Therefore, each data collection activity was informed by those that occurred previously, in the tradition of grounded theory development (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). All three meetings involved collaboration between the authors and NAM staff members, who helped facilitate the focus group meetings as well as the forum.

Participants

Selected respondents represented a broad range of immigrant communities living across the Los Angeles area; namely Arab, ethnic Chinese (Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking), Indonesian, Iranian (Persian), Korean, Latino, Sri Lankan, and Vietnamese-origin communities. Participants were also selected with the aim of representing a diversity of media outlet sizes, scopes, and types. The print, television, and radio outlets represented in these group meetings ranged in size and sophistication from local newspapers published bi-monthly, to mid-size weekly or daily outlets with regional reach, as well as locally based outposts of international media conglomerates. Seven respondents participated in the 2007 focus group, eight in the 2008 roundtable forum, and eight in the focus group held in 2008, for a total of 23 respondents whose positions ranged from staff reporters to managing editors. Each meeting lasted between two and two and a half hours.

Analysis

The three meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for close textual analysis. Following the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), each

transcript was read carefully multiple times by both authors independently to begin to identify emergent themes. The constant comparative method requires simultaneous coding and analysis of data as they are collected (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). At each stage of data collection, the authors reviewed their individual findings together to further detail emerging patterns and resolve minor differences in interpretation of findings. These discussions helped to guide decisions on protocol development for the subsequent group discussions that would deepen authors' understandings of the forces producers identified as most influential on the development of their professional identities.

Findings

Data analyses revealed what ethnic media producers perceived as the major influences on their abilities to develop inclusive and specialist professional identities. Three of these influences were external to their communities of practice, and we therefore conceive of them as macro-level, social factors. The first of these was the nature of their interactions with mainstream media. Respondents noted asymmetries in interpersonal interactions with their mainstream counterparts, as well as differences between mainstream and ethnic media organizations' access to resources, widely defined. These asymmetries were closely related to the second macro-level factor, which was constrained access to mainstream societal institutions and to people who held positions of power within them. The third was the audiences that these producers served, whose expectations of 'their' media could pressure producers to emphasize their specialist identities over their inclusive ones. These external factors were negotiated by respondents at the organizational level, within their communities of practice. In these contexts, they demonstrated self-defined professional expectations and standards, while trying to manage potential constraints tied to their supervisors' managerial ideologies, as well as to the routines and resources of the organizations that employed them. Findings related to each of these influences are detailed in turn in the sections that follow.

Interactions with mainstream media and professional identity development

In the course of their professional lives (e.g. pursuing stories, attending press conferences), ethnic media producers have frequent contact with colleagues working for mainstream media. These interactions influence how they develop inclusive and specialist professional identities. Two major themes emerged in relation to respondents' experiences. The first was that ceding authority to mainstream media colleagues to define the benchmarks for inclusive professional identities resulted in ethnic media producers being more likely to emphasize specialist identities. The second, related theme was that relationships between ethnic and mainstream media professionals in the broader media landscape were viewed as asymmetrical in terms of organizational resources at their disposal to develop stories (e.g. capital, access to news sources, and audience reach). These inequalities affected how ethnic media producers viewed themselves and prospects of collaborating with mainstream counterparts.

Defining inclusive identities. Husband (2005: 472) noted, '[t]he acquisition of a positive professional identity is difficult to detach from the generic benchmarks employed by "the profession"'. Our respondents implicitly authorized their mainstream media professionals to define what constituted these benchmarks. It was against these measures that they noted differences in terms of their individual and institutional routines and resources, but they made these comparisons without challenging what those benchmarks should be. For example, the editor of a local, fortnightly Sri Lankan publication made the following observation:

Mainstream media ... give so little emotion that we have become what we have become because we go the other way. We say, 'if you want just [the] story, there it is: in the *L.A. Times* ... But if you want to be more involved with it, okay, here it is, that's what we do.' So perhaps [we are] a foil ... that's the reason.

This editor framed mainstream media stories as emotionless accounts, reflecting professional requirements of 'objective' reporting. She contrasted ethnic media against this standard, saying they become 'more involved' in their stories. However, by framing ethnic media as the 'foil' to mainstream media practices, she implicitly defines her work in opposition to the local standard for mainstream journalism (i.e. the *Los Angeles Times*), constraining her ability to claim an inclusive professional identity. These kinds of negotiations were common among respondents, who perceived their mainstream counterparts to be capable of policing the boundaries of inclusive identity. Rather than be defined as something other (and often less) than professional journalists, most participants, like the editor above, chose to foreground their specialist identity.

Asymmetrical relationships with mainstream media. Ceding authority to mainstream media to define the standards of inclusive identity reflected tensions between ethnic and mainstream media. Implicitly or explicitly, most respondents characterized the relationship between ethnic and mainstream media organizations as asymmetrical. This was the result of perceived differences in resources they had at their disposal to produce stories. Research based on media system dependency theory suggests that imbalances in resources engender power differences and dependency relationships (Ball-Rokeach, 1998; Matsaganis and Payne, 2005), which in this case impacted how ethnic media professionals defined themselves and how they felt they were treated by mainstream media colleagues (and institutions).

Respondents discussed, for example, having to depend on mainstream media resources to cover stories, either routinely or for coverage of unusual events. An editor for a Chinese-language newspaper with national reach said:

... for the Asian media, I would say [that] when [we] cover ... world attention issue[s], of course we have our own angle, but a lot of our sources ... [are] coming out of the mainstream, for example, AP [Associated Press] writers.

The institutional routine of depending on wire services to cover major stories is common among ethnic media (Matsaganis et al., 2011), but even more so among smaller media organizations. Given that this producer worked for a transnational

media outlet with a parent company in China, it is striking that they depended regularly on AP wire reports. This practice highlights how limited many ethnic media institutions' resources are for covering major stories, compared with many mainstream operations.

While mainstream media retain much of the power to define what being a professional journalist means, there are times when ethnic media producers have opportunities to influence their mainstream counterparts. Mainstream media producers may rely on their ethnic media counterparts when news requires intimate knowledge of their country of origin or community of settlement. Study participants shared experiences when they had been asked to provide background or make community contacts for mainstream media colleagues who do not routinely focus on those issues or places. A reporter for a Spanish-language newspaper with regional reach commented that when something happens in Mexico, 'it does give you a certain advantage ... because you know the community, you know who to phone, and sometimes it's just a matter of phoning the right person.' These advantages can help ethnic media professionals ensure that stories are accurate for broader audiences by educating their colleagues in mainstream media. These instances of knowledge-sharing could help foster inclusive identities across mainstream and ethnic media through shared professional practices. The infrequency of these events and the fleeting attention they command in mainstream coverage, however, again speaks to asymmetries that influenced ethnic media producers' professional identity development.

These inequalities notwithstanding, the foregoing examples underscore that ethnic and mainstream media professionals operate in a shared media landscape. Audiences increasingly connect with media outlets across the ethnic and mainstream media spectra (Katz et al., 2012; Matsaganis et al., 2011; Wilkin et al., 2007). Furthermore, media ownership consolidation has resulted in companies having both ethnic and mainstream media holdings (e.g. NBC's acquisition of Spanish-language multimedia company Telemundo in 2002), such that ties between mainstream and ethnic media are bound to grow in number and complexity (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2003; Waldman, 2011).

While these changes present opportunities, participants generally had misgivings about joint ventures or mergers between ethnic and mainstream media because of the uneven power dynamics they perceived in ethnic/mainstream media relationships. For example, when asked whether the Spanish-language daily *La Opinión*, by virtue of being the second largest paper in Los Angeles with a daily circulation of approximately 80,000, could ever match the status of the *Los Angeles Times*, one respondent said flatly, 'No, never in a million years,' which prompted laughter and agreement from the rest of the group. He continued by explaining that despite the reach and visibility of *La Opinión*, he did not believe ethnic media could be viewed with equal status by their mainstream counterparts. Under these conditions, collaborative efforts with mainstream media would be imbalanced from inception, making such ventures less attractive to ethnic media professionals.

The effects of asymmetry in ethnic/mainstream media relationships are also felt within larger organizations with both types of media holdings. A reporter for a Spanish-language television station owned by such an organization said:

I used to work for *Hoy* [newspaper], and *Hoy* is part of the *L.A. Times* [Group] and you [could say] ... why not just translate from the *L.A. Times*? [But] somehow ... Things that in the *L.A. Times* would be understood or taken or managed in some way ... in Spanish ... the framework [of] understanding is just different.

On TV, it's the same ... Channel 4 is our sister station and we share the newsroom. We are there desk to desk, and somehow we don't communicate. It is just totally different operation, it is unbelievable ... I mean, they have some resources [in common] here and there; there is a press conference and you send a camera man that can do both, but when you are talking about real content ... it is totally different.

Despite sharing a parent company and presumably a set of institutional resources, this reporter described ethnic and mainstream communities of practice with little to no overlap in their managerial ideologies. He described news broadcasts from shared physical space that did not facilitate interaction and collaboration, acknowledging it as 'unbelievable'. He provided a partial explanation by describing different needs, understandings, and tastes of audiences which preclude 'translating' (literally or figuratively) content from one audience to another. His explanation underscores that specialist identities emerge not only at the nexus of institutional and subjective level forces (Burkitt et al., 2001), but also through constant comparison to mainstream journalism practices.

Mainstream institutions and professional identity development

How ethnic media producers defined themselves was partially explained by how respondents felt they were treated by politicians and other high profile sources (e.g. government agencies). They felt mainstream media professionals had more access to these sources, leading respondents to conclude that they were viewed as less important and professional. For example, a long-time reporter for a Korean newspaper with national reach relayed the following story:

I was sharing an office at L.A. City Hall's press room with a reporter ... from a mainstream [publication]. There was an issue we both were covering and we both had to speak with the deputy director of a city department ... I told his secretary who I am, and she put me on hold. She came back and asked me to leave a message. Immediately after I hung up, my officemate called the same guy and was able to speak with him right away. My officemate felt pity for me. At the end of his conversation, he said I had left a message and was still waiting for a return call. I right away called the official one more time. But the official again wasn't available. I had to leave another message.

Echoing this experience was the managing editor of a pan-Asian television station:

The problem we have is with politicians – with non-Asian politicians – and they talk an enormous amount of BS about the importance of engaging minorities ... [but] they will never talk to us, they will never give us the time of day. We are the largest Asian [television] station in the United States. We are the largest Asian station in Los Angeles, serving the second largest ethnic group, and it takes a hundred and fifty phone calls to get the mayor to talk to us.

Experiences with major stakeholders and news sources who seemed to neither care nor understand who they were directly influenced what respondents were able to report on, and how. In addition, much like their interactions with mainstream media colleagues, differential treatment by these stakeholders made ethnic media producers feel less qualified to claim inclusive identities as professional journalists.

Another respondent raised the now-infamous incident during Hilary Clinton's campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2008. Clinton's staff turned away reporters from Chinese-American media outlets at a San Francisco press conference – despite their having credentials required for entry – because the conference was closed to 'foreign press' (Chien, 2007). Clinton held a special roundtable in San Francisco the following month with 40 professionals from Asian-American media, attempting to make amends for the gaffe. The last three mayors of Los Angeles had adopted a similar strategy, holding ethnic media briefings separate from those held with mainstream media. A journalist for a local, bilingual Latino newspaper reflected on this strategy, saying:

Some media [professionals], they were really happy because they said 'Gee, this is the only time we really ever have access,' so it's great that we can get in and we start to know [the mayor], on one hand. But you wonder about a city as diverse as Los Angeles ... why do we need to [be] separate?

Her ambivalence reflects appreciation for any level of guaranteed access to major players, but a sense of resentment for reifying distinctions between ethnic media professionals' communities of practice and those of their mainstream counterparts. Murray and her colleagues (2007: 108) captured similar practices in Canada since their 2004 federal election, where 'segregated news conferences ... [became] more popular ... [though] such strategic behavior is often kept behind closed doors'.

Differential treatment by public officials also highlighted distinctions among ethnic media professionals themselves. Antonio Villaraigosa was at that time the first Latino mayor of Los Angeles. Respondents from media serving Asian-origin populations complained of having less access to the mayor's office than Latino media, since briefings with ethnic media were held in Spanish and English. The manager of a pan-Asian television station said, 'If he can do [the briefing] in Spanish, he should also make himself available in other key languages, like Korean and Chinese,' a comment supported by others serving non-Latino audiences. The size of the Latino population in Los Angeles fosters demographic power which, from the perspective of respondents serving other groups, translated into relatively greater access for Latino journalists and prominence for their media outlets.

These perceived intergroup differences highlight that ethnic media are not a homogenous media sector; variations exist by medium (e.g. television, radio, newspaper), scope (i.e. local, regional, or national audiences), and target audience, but also by financial and social resources (e.g. advertising revenues, social influence resulting from demographic prominence). As Husband (2005) notes, such differences can even foster competition among ethnic media serving the same communities, making collaborations or pooling of resources less likely.

Specialist identities imposed by the ethnic community

Ethnic media professionals are affected by pressures from the mainstream, but also from the ethnic communities they serve. Participants indicated that their relationships to their audiences influenced their communities of practice in several ways.

While most media – ethnic or mainstream – are dependent on their audiences for their survival, covering specific communities means targeting clearly defined, smaller populations. This typically translates into more limited access to human and financial resources (e.g. staff, advertising revenue, and subscriptions). This increases interdependence between community and ethnic media at the institutional level, influencing not only managerial ideologies around what to cover and how (i.e. the media's agenda), but also journalists' professional identities.

Tight links with the ethnic community can shape the identity of the ethnic media organization and its journalists in forceful ways. There are several documented cases of ethnic communities protesting editorial decisions and punishing 'their' media for inappropriate coverage (e.g. Browne, 2005). The editor of the Sri Lankan publication reflected this awareness, noting that sensitive community issues can make people emotional: 'it is very easy to hurt feelings... [and] you can lose advertising [and] readers.'

Community pressures are even expressed violently on occasion. The publisher of the largest Vietnamese daily in the USA shared her story during the roundtable forum. In 2008, the newspaper ran a special insert magazine profiling a student who had recently won the prestigious Robert Haas fellowship for an art installation. The installation included several nail salon tubs painted in the colors of the defunct republic of South Vietnam. It was meant as a tribute to the artist's mother-in-law, a refugee who worked in nail salons to send her children to college. Neither the art installation nor the cover image was intended to be controversial. However, anti-communist members of the community were insulted by the flag being painted onto tubs where people's dirty feet get washed. Complaints poured into the publisher's office, resulting in the editor-in-chief and managing editor being fired. Protesters were not appeased and redoubled their efforts, leading to arrests for assault of a reporter. Newspaper staff reportedly heard protesters threatening to desecrate the grave of the newspaper's founder if their demands were not met.

While this case is exceptional, it highlights how the interdependence between ethnic media and their audiences can produce unique pressures on producers' professional identity development. Because ethnic media are often viewed as the community's voice, audience members can feel compelled to discipline producers they believe to be deviating from such roles. Their expectations may draw from sensitivity to how the community is perceived in diaspora, or may reflect the imported values of the immigrants themselves. Viewing media as the Fourth Estate is rooted in US history and ideology; the media traditions and histories of other countries are often decidedly more partisan. Immigrants may retain such expectations when they migrate. In either case, these pressures can reify journalists' commitments to their specialist identity by constraining their abilities to adhere to norms associated with an inclusive one.

Professional identity as shaped within the community of practice

As discussed above, forces external to respondents' communities of practice often influenced their abilities to assert an inclusive professional identity. Respondents were acutely

aware of these forces and grappled with the challenges they presented, in context of the media organizations that employed them. These struggles were clear both at the individual level, in terms of how journalists personally defined and resolved tensions between 'objectivity' and 'advocacy' in their work, and at the institutional level, in how they negotiated professional standards and managerial ideologies.

Redefining advocacy to claim inclusive identity. In the USA, mainstream media, policymakers, and other news sources have held 'objectivity' as a benchmark of journalists' professional identities for over a century (Deuze, 2005; Hafez, 2004; Josephi, 2007). Objective reporting therefore becomes a standard requirement for espousing an inclusive professional identity from the perspectives of these stakeholders, and ethnic media journalists are often seen as failing to adhere to it (Ojo, 2006). Being labeled as 'community advocates' or 'mission-driven media' (Levi, 2002) has consequences for how these producers are treated by authority figures and by advertisers. These labels can constrain ethnic media producers' abilities to serve as information resources for their audiences and affect their financial viability. Even when used by supporters, the 'advocate' label highlights how these producers are different from their mainstream counterparts in ways that mark them as less professional, thereby reinforcing their specialist identities.

Our participants were keenly aware that appearing objective was a prerequisite for entry to the inclusive identity of their profession. They also articulated why these prerequisites existed in tension with their specialist identity as ethnic media professionals. Respondents rejected the perceived accusation that they failed to meet the objectivity standard and attempted to distance themselves from charges of advocacy that labeled them as champions of their audiences' special interests. To do so, they redefined advocacy in their own terms. An editor of a local Spanish-language publication serving Latinos across Los Angeles said:

I think for us, the idea of being advocates is that we don't necessarily advocate on a certain position for an issue, but we're advocates in the sense that we give people the information to make their own decisions and to be active.

This editor reframed the advocate label to refer to their mission of developing a well-informed citizenry, a value deeply rooted in US mainstream media traditions (Merritt and Rosen, 1994; Pickard, 2010). In a similar vein, a producer for an Iranian radio station described his and his colleagues' roles this way:

[W]e don't consider ourselves advocates, because we don't want to have any side, politically especially. We just try, for example, to run all the PSAs free of charge for all the non-profit organizations, NGOs. We are trying to help people understand the rule of the country, we are trying to tell them where they are living and this is a different country and this is a different rule ... And this is what kind of advocates we are.

By recasting advocacy as congruent with an inclusive professional identity and distancing themselves from specialist labels, respondents challenged what they perceived as resistance from mainstream media to accepting them as colleagues with common professional norms.

Participants not only recast their alleged advocacy, they also challenged the notion of objectivity. A reporter from a Korean publication with national reach said:

The American newspapers are going to be objective as long as it doesn't compromise their national interests, American interests; [for] Korean newspapers, French newspapers, Chinese papers, the same thing. For national papers, the boundary is wider because you're talking about a whole country, millions of people. But for ethnic papers, their boundary is narrow; [and focused on] Koreatown or Chinatown.

His comment emphasized that ethnic media professionals, like their mainstream media counterparts, have to consider the interests of the community they serve and of the country they live in, simultaneously. Moreover, he draws attention to the linkages between media serving their audiences and their survival; in the case of ethnic media, these pressures are ethnically delimited. Mainstream media have similar pressures, but, as he notes, their 'wider' boundaries more frequently permit them to appear objective.

Individual identities and institutional forces. Since communities of practice emerge at the intersection of individual and institutional level forces (Burkitt et al., 2001), producers' professional identities are also influenced by managerial ideologies, institutional routines, and resources. The institutional level of these communities of practice is also affected by relationships to agents beyond their boundaries. Therefore, forces external to ethnic media organizations not only shape individual producers' professional identities directly, but indirectly, by influencing the institutional dimensions of their communities of practice. This indirect influence manifested most readily in respondents' relationships with their superiors.

For example, newspapers have established routines for story production. These are fairly consistent across the profession; however, individual managers' styles and ideologies may be in tension with these standardized ways. Such tensions were evident in many participants' stories about interactions with their editors. A reporter for a regional Latino newspaper commented:

[E]very week I have a fight with my bosses about this ... Every time I write a story, if I have to take a 15 minute break just to analyze the story, I do that. Now when it goes to the desk of the boss, it could be a different story because they want to decide on Hispanic news, and I guess when you see it objectively it is hard for [mainstream] society to respect that because it's a one-sided story.

His editor's managerial ideology dictated that the reporter fulfill his professional obligations by producing stories consistent with the editor's view of their audience. Over time, this ideology could influence how the reporter selects and covers stories, essentially reifying the reporter's specialist identity. As Husband (2005: 467) points out, an ethnic media organization may 'very well be *explicitly* and determinedly ethnic in self-definition and purpose', such that ethnic identity becomes a 'routinely salient facet of ... professional practice' for many producers. In the process, it also becomes implicated in the negotiation between commitments to inclusive and specialist professional identities.

Conclusions

Our analyses suggest that ethnic media producers' identity development is driven by negotiations of a variety of relationships, within and beyond the media organizations in which they work. Our respondents generally defined their professional identities in contrast to those of their mainstream counterparts. These framings were grounded in differential treatment they experienced from these mainstream colleagues, mainstream societal institutions, and prominent individuals (particularly politicians). Limited access to key information sources also reinforced respondents' feeling 'different', and often inferior to, mainstream media producers. Ethnic media producers were keenly aware that they had difficulty reconciling professional practices associated with their inclusive and specialist identities. This was evident in how they defended themselves against perceived charges that they were advocates for the communities they served, at the expense of being the impartial reporters that 'true' professional journalists supposedly are.

Continued audience fragmentation and media convergence, the emergence of new media forms, such as blogs, and the increasingly complex institutional arrangements in today's media environments amplify the individual and organizational challenges involved in balancing inclusive and specialist identities. While one might expect, for instance, that mergers and acquisitions between ethnic and mainstream media organizations (e.g. Telemundo and NBC) might blur divisions between mainstream and ethnic media producers to their mutual benefit, there are many ways in which these separations are accentuated and reified through everyday practices. Even when mainstream and ethnic media outlets share resources (e.g. cameras, presses), the norms and principles guiding content production appear to remain distinct.

Frequently, the justification for preserving divisions between mainstream and ethnic media production, even within the same company, is the concern that their audiences' expectations are equally distinct. The considerable interdependence between some media and the communities they serve prompted many respondents to accentuate their specialist identities. Ethnic communities can be powerful enforcers of production norms that limit reconciliation of journalists' inclusive and specialist identities. This was a significant source of concern for many participants, who saw the ethnic media/community relationship as constraining their capabilities to fulfill the expectations of an inclusive professional identity as journalists (e.g. impartial reporting or watchdog roles). Such 'policing' of producers may negatively affect a medium's survival prospects, for example, when financial dependence on the community impedes ethnic media producers' efforts to bridge between the ethnic community and mainstream society.

In addition, as journalism evolves as a result of technological innovation and new media economics, inclusive and specialist professional journalist identities are being challenged and redefined. Will being defined as a professional journalist become limited to, for example, working for a large-scale media organization, as opposed to an online-only media operation or a blog? The redrawing of boundaries around inclusive professional identity may also blur the analytic distinction between mainstream and ethnic media. For producers of large-scale ethnic media organizations serving national populations – like Univision, for instance, in the USA – claiming an inclusive professional identity may become easier, as their organizations are increasingly treated as legitimate

competitors in their respective media markets. For producers of smaller-scale or online-only ethnic media, access to the club of 'real' professionals may be more elusive.

Clearly, media shape and are shaped by the social environments in which they are established. An ecological perspective that considers ethnic and mainstream media production in context of each other is therefore most likely to augment our understanding of issues tied to increasing diversity, both demographically and in the media landscape. Arguably, the factors that separate ethnic media from mainstream media and render ethnic media professionals and organizations invisible, less credible, and less 'professional', also reify divides between mainstream society and ethnic minority populations. For instance, how policymakers treat media serving Asian-origin populations in a major US metropolis like Los Angeles might be telling of how mainstream institutions treat the needs and demands of these groups more generally.

From an organizational perspective, we also expect that new research highlighting the professional challenges of ethnic media producers and the ethnic/mainstream media divide (e.g. in terms of access to sources) will, first of all, problematize the norms that permeate 'professional' practices in mainstream journalism. Husband (2005: 477) argues that the:

... dominant presence of majority ethnic values and professional norms must be challenged ... A diverse media training environment, including contested values and the expectation of 'engaged' partisan practice, would be a potential corrective to the stasis of much contemporary media practice.

Relatedly, Awad (2011) found that US Latinos felt excluded from coverage by a mainstream newspaper, the *San Jose Mercury News*, because strict compliance with professional standards of objectivity made it virtually impossible for the newspaper to represent, and therefore adequately serve, minority audiences (see also Molina-Guzmán, 2006). Such changes in values and norms in production will, over time, influence professional norms among journalists more generally.

Our study took place in a major US metropolis, known for its population diversity. Los Angeles is in fact a majority-minority city,² and therefore particularly fertile ground for ethnic media development. Therefore, our respondents' experiences are more likely akin to those of ethnic media producers in other major urban centers around the world, and may not reflect the realities of producers working in smaller, less ethnically diverse cities. For example, access to elected officials may be even more restricted in less diverse environments than was the case for producers in Los Angeles, where policymakers have increasingly had to contend with ethnically diverse constituent bases and media environments.

Looking forward, we believe that new research on ethnic media can contribute to the vitality of the growing ethnic media sector. It is critical that such research be guided by grounded theory robust enough to facilitate comparative empirical research across national and regional contexts. Consistent with this aim, we have applied and expanded Husband's (2005) conceptual framework of ethnic media as communities of practice to the experience of producers in a major US urban center. Our objective was to begin to address gaps in the literature related to ethnic media production, with the hope of

encouraging further research that contributes not only to a unified literature on ethnic media production, but also enhances the literature on media production more generally. As societies continue to evolve, ethnic media should not be considered separately from other media – but rather, as an important component of a media landscape that reflects the increasing diversity of the societies they serve.

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Notes

1. Best Faculty Paper Award at ICA 2013, Journalism Studies Division.
2. Los Angeles became the first city in the USA to have as many Spanish-speaking households as English-speaking in 2000; by the 2010 Census, 52 percent of households in Los Angeles were Spanish-speaking.

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