

Stealing Signs: In-house sports reporters and journalistic boundary work

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Abstract

Responding to declining independent media coverage and taking advantage of new communication technologies, sports teams and leagues have entered the media business. This has included hiring reporters to write news content for their websites. Often produced by people plucked from press boxes, this content mirrors many of the genre conventions of news, right down to claims by the people writing it that these texts count as journalism. Using interview data, content analysis and textual analysis, this project finds that many working in this capacity claim to be journalists and articulate their job practices and ethical standards in ways that reconcile this belief with their employment situation. I analyze these data through the framework of boundary work, which describes the ways occupational groups discursively construct their limits in order to capture or preserve authority. The challenge to occupational categories and the adding of media production capabilities by sports organizations illustrate the limits of models of the sports media system, which treat actors as static and describe pre-digital era message flows. Sports journalism is changing as new voices stream into the media system. The ability of in-house reporters to claim a journalistic identity is helped along by sports journalism's tenuous connection to the larger profession, which has been challenged on ethical grounds for nearly a century.

This project finds that in-house reporters articulate a series of relationships with other actors in the sports media system typical of journalists, right down to a rivalry with public relations departments. In-house reporters also adopt the journalism ethics of truth-seeking and independence in order to construct their identity. They say they strive to report only accurate information and maintain the freedom to write critically. Yet when put into the practice, both of these ethics tend to emphasize team control over information. In-house reporters define truth as

information the team has confirmed. They tend to limit their sources to people connected to team, meaning they fish for information in a small pool. Most do not break news and downplay the practice as wasted effort. When faced with an unexpected story such as athletes engaging in protest, they say they have the freedom to define their news agendas, although disagree on the newsworthiness of those events.

This project argues that in-house reporters' ethical claims represent boundary work, but that their approach fails to connect with journalism's normative orientation toward an informed citizenry and full civic participation. Their attempts to claim journalistic authority may succeed in gaining themselves credibility with their audience, but the primary beneficiary of this is team itself, which gains authority for its website and greater control over information. An ethical approach drawn from work on mixed-media ethics is proposed for in-house reporters.

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Introduction

After what had been relatively steady growth during the first years of the 20th century, the business of baseball hit a downturn in 1914. Teams claimed they were losing money as gate attendance declined. Increased competition likely explained much of the revenue shortfall. A new baseball league, the short-lived Federal League, launched in 1914. It placed some of its teams in established baseball cities; fans in Chicago and St. Louis suddenly had three options instead of two and in New York four teams now were competing for fan dollars and attention. Making matters worse financially, the Federal League ignored rules imposed by owners in the other two leagues preventing teams from raiding other rosters, driving up labor costs after a decade of artificial restraint (Burk, 2001).

In response, the advertising journal *Printers' Ink* asked if the decline in baseball's bottom line was the natural result of the sport's longtime aversion to paid publicity (Clifford, 1914). Baseball occupied an undeniably strong cultural position, but in using advertising sparingly, *Printers' Ink* wondered if the sport missed opportunities to communicate with its fans. The Chicago Cubs spent just \$2,500 on advertising in 1914 – about one thousand dollars less than rookie Babe Ruth made in salary the following year. Professional baseball failed to invest in educational campaigns and traditional publicity work, which *Printers' Ink* thought necessary to create new fans. Instead, it outsourced this job to the nation's newspapers and fathers. Newspapers supported baseball by providing, “on average two pages of free publicity every day” (Clifford, 1914 p. 17). Baseball owners were mistaken to rely on newspapers, *Printers' Ink* warned. News coverage was often negative and benefitted the sport as a whole rather than a specific team. Moreover, this coverage could disappear at any moment; *Printers' Ink* reported that newspapers were chafing at the \$10 to \$12 per day it cost to send a reporter on the road with a team (p. 17). To an advertising journal, perhaps every problem looks like something that can be

solved through advertising. But given what it saw as imminent threats to the flow of baseball information, Printers' Ink concluded that teams should start generating their own publicity.

It took a century, but the world Printers' Ink forecast appears to be arriving. Economic challenges brought on by the rise of digital media have swamped the news industry, and sports departments have felt their share of the staff cuts and space reductions. By many accounts the public's appetite for sports news remains as strong as ever (Anderson, 2013a), but legacy media lack the resources to satisfy it. The internet has filled in some of this gap, taking on the national reporting that newspapers used to produce (Kian & Zimmerman, 2012). The team-based coverage that city newspapers long provided is diminishing. To replace that, teams and leagues have acted to fill this gap, and in the process transformed themselves into, at least in part, media companies.

Today the big four North American professional sports leagues and many college athletics conferences operate branded digital cable channels. These leagues and their teams also use their websites to provide daily news updates in both print and broadcast formats. These outlets may replicate the work of independent news, often competing directly for fan attention (Fry, 2011). Their ability to reach audiences directly is a result of the technological shifts that have disrupted communication networks during the past two decades. Media companies – and the journalists they employ – no longer sit alone between institutional actors and their desired audiences. The ability of governments and businesses to communicate using these new technologies has scrambled the communication flows and professional categories that characterized the previous era.

In talking directly to their fans, in-house sports outlets have chosen to speak in a journalistic voice. As reporters departed independent outlets for in-house media, they brought

with them the genre conventions of traditional news, forms of storytelling imbued with cultural meaning (Bird & Dardenne, 1997; Jenkins, 2000; Schudson, 2005). Those reporters also transplanted their professional identities as journalists. Leaving journalism for public relations is a time-honored media tradition, but in-house sports writers rejected the idea that this is what they had done.

When reporter Rich Hammond left the Los Angeles Daily News in 2009 to join the Los Angeles Kings hockey team's website he told readers:

I will draw a salary from the Kings, but none of the stories and/or blogs I write will be reviewed for approval by any member of the Kings' staff ... I will not 'go easy' on the Kings out of any fear of retribution ... Praise and criticism, to the extent I feel either is warranted, will continue to be distributed fairly (Hammond, via Kings, 2009).

When legendary basketball writer Sam Smith joined the Chicago Bulls' website after nearly three decades covering the sport for the Chicago Tribune, he said, "I'm confident I will have the independence I have always had to inform, entertain and analyze. I'm staking a quarter-century of credibility on that" (Libit, 2011). Stories on Major League Baseball team websites include the standard disclaimer: "This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs" (as discussed in Chapter 3, baseball team sites are operated a league-owned subsidiary rather than the teams directly). These statements make journalistic claims for the work in-house sports reporters produce. They posit that these reporters can provide credible information while cashing a paycheck bearing the team's logo.

These claims seem anathema to most definitions of journalism. Independence and truth-seeking are core journalism ethics, central to its professional ideology. Those ethics have helped journalists define themselves as a profession and make claims for the validity and importance of the news they produce. In-house reporting appears to conflict directly with these ideals. On the other hand, those ethics are increasingly difficult to operationalize in the contemporary media

environment. Changes in the ownership structures of news organizations create the potential for myriad conflicts (Davis & Craft, 2000; Jung & Kim, 2011). The professional status of journalists has always been a complicated proposition. The field never enjoyed many of the benefits of classic professions like law and medicine, which give practitioners the ability to exert more control over their professional lives (Singer, 2003; Zelizer, 1993). The rise of digital tools opened the media field, Singer writes, forcing journalists to re-justify their own professional value in a period where amateurs can do many of the same things. Definitions of journalism have shifted over the last two decades to accommodate new practices, practitioners and economic models (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Rosen, 2005).

Defining journalism is not the same thing as determining whether a baseball has landed inside or outside the foul line. Journalism has never been a fixed object, but rather a shifting idea, shaped and reshaped based on changing social conditions (Schudson, 1978). This is common across professions, which strategically deploy definitions of themselves to maintain control over a set of societal tasks (Abbott, 1988). Yet professional control over a task is always subject to revision. A profession's jurisdictional claim over certain societal functions can be expanded, limited, reshaped or displaced. For much of the 20th century, journalism claimed jurisdiction over news, which expanded from newspapers into the new mediums of radio and television, and tried to do so online as well. It has been less successful in this last case. Journalism's control over news has weakened as communication spaces have opened to new voices, forcing the profession to redefine itself (S. C. Lewis, 2012; Robinson, 2011).

Thomas Gieryn (1983) described the process by which professional groups negotiate control over societal jurisdictions as "boundary work." Professional communities use strategic discourse to expand their jurisdictions, repel outsiders and protect their own autonomy. They

draw boundaries around themselves, using differentiation to establish their unique importance. Boundaries are negotiated during what Gieryn (1999) calls credibility contests, periods in which existing authority is challenged. These are moments in which a professional group and its challengers redefine their relationships to each other and to the public, which ultimately must accede to new structures of authority. Journalism's jurisdiction over news relies on institutional actors and audiences agreeing to the idea that the information the profession provides has value. Credibility contests involve a range of stakeholders, therefore, not just members of the profession itself. Sam Smith's claims to journalist status three paragraphs above may be contested by reporters at independent outlets covering the Chicago Bulls. But if readers, sources and even other reporters) generally understand Smith's work on Bulls.com as journalism, objections based on textbook definitions would carry less weight than practical engagement.

Journalism has been embroiled in what might be described as a two-decade long credibility contest, as members of the profession try to define their jurisdiction in the digital era (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). Academic work focusing on the future of journalism has, perhaps not surprisingly, privileged the voices of journalists. The boundary work perspective argues that journalism's professional status is established socially, meaning outside voices play a major role in defining the profession and must be accounted for (Carlson, 2015b). In-house sports reporters are part of a new occupational group, whose members want the status that comes with being recognized as journalists.

This project advances the study of boundary work in journalism by uncovering the ways in-house sports reporters discursively construct the profession's border in order to place themselves inside. It examines the ways in-house reporters conceptualize their relationships with employers, other journalists, and the field's core ethical principles in order to carve out a space in

the profession for themselves and lay claim to the legitimacy that comes with membership.

Specifically this dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What draws writers to positions at in-house media? How do they see themselves fitting into the corporate structures of sporting organizations, and how do those structures affect daily work routines and the editorial process? What pressures do they feel within their own organizations? How do they view their own place within the competitive environment of sports media? (Chapter 3)

RQ2: Do in-house sports reporters define themselves as journalists? For those that do, how do they define journalism in ways that include them despite the financial and organizational conflicts that arise from working for the sports organization they are reporting about? (Chapter 4)

RQ3: What ethical principles do these writers articulate as part of their professional identity? What ethics do they practice? How do they reconcile their own employment situation with those ethics? (Chapter 4)

RQ4: How do in-house reporters approach sensitive stories and breaking news? (Chapter 5)

RQ5: How do in-house reporters use ethical discourse to articulate boundaries of journalism that contain them? (Chapter 6)

Methods and theoretical framework

To answer these questions, I draw largely on the results of 24 interviews with in-house reporters across the four major North American professional sports leagues and Division I college athletic departments. I refer to the interviewees throughout as in-house reporters, a term I settled on after many iterations. This term captures their indeterminate status in the system of media professions, putting them somewhere between marketer and journalist. Reporter and journalist often are used as synonyms, but for the purposes of discussion here, journalism represents an ideal for reporters to aspire to. The 24 interviews represent a significant fraction of in-house sports reporters, given that this is an emerging field. I also present in Chapter 5 a case study describing how in-house reporters approached athlete participation in the Black Lives Matter protests in the fall of 2014. That case study included six of those interviews, textual analysis of about 30 articles posted on team sites – and the near 100 attached comments – as well

as 10 team Twitter feeds. I also employed textual and content analysis of team media guides for data presented in Chapter 3. This section discusses the methodological approaches taken in the dissertation.

Interview data

The interview data presented here were collected in two waves, first during the spring of 2013 as part of a project that served as a pilot study for this dissertation and then during the winter and spring of 2015. Interview subjects were selected through a mix of purposive, random and snowball sampling. The pilot study sought in-house reporters who previously had worked in newsrooms and also excluded reporters from mlb.com because they worked a league-owned third party rather than for the teams themselves. For the second wave of data collection, both of these conditions were dropped, although many interviewees had that background. Interviewees for the second wave of collection were selected through a mix of random selection and with the Black Lives Matter case study in mind. I also used snowball sampling; when an interviewee suggested a name or team, that person was added to the contact list, although the second interviewee was not notified of this.

All subjects were contacted by email, using addresses found in league media directories. In all, 55 writers were contacted for interviews, of which 24 consented to an interview. Only three respondents turned down interview requests. One replied challenging the premise of the study and did respond to a follow-up email. Another repeatedly rescheduled the interview before ceasing to respond to emails. A third declined after ascertaining the purpose of the study. The rest of the non-interviewees simply did not respond to multiple emails. The interview sample skewed heavily male, 22 of the 24 interviews were with men. No other demographic information was collected, although all described their work histories. Many interviewees consented to the

use of their names, however given the variation, all quotations are anonymized with the exception of Chapter 5 (see below).

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe the interview as the “digging tool of social science” (p. 171). The language an interview subject uses tells researchers about the way he or she organizes the world. The fundamental assumption is that interviewees can provide a meaningful account of their own experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The goal is an account in the subject’s own terms that illuminates how he or she sees the world, “Though each person interprets the events he or she encounters in a somewhat distinct manner, he or she is likely, at the same time, to bring to bear the understandings held by peers, family, friends, coreligionists, or members of other groups to which he or she belongs” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 29). Professional groups could be included on that list.

Interviews for this project were semi-structured with follow-up questions. These questions focused on how reporters found their way to in-house outlets, their employment histories and their relationships with other team personnel and independent reporters. I also asked them to define their core job practices and how the ways they applied journalism principles in their in-house positions (the interview guide can be found in Appendix A). The same interview guide was used in both waves of data collection. Interviews were conducted by phone or Skype, recorded and transcribed using the program Inqscribe. Conducting the interviews by phone did not allow me observe subjects in person or draw conclusions by body language. Most interviews lasted about 40 minutes, with the shortest running about 20 minutes and the longest lasting about an hour.

Interviews are interactions, a conversation between individuals rather than a situation in which a passive subject has knowledge harvested by the researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

An interview subject creates a narrative for the interviewer, in response to questions (Douglas, 1985). Interactions are embedded in relationships of power, with the person doing the questioning often in the dominant position (Robinson, 2014). Interviewees for this project exhibited some sensitivities to questions about their occupational role. Many chafed at the idea that they were engaged in something other than journalism, and my approach to asking questions changed over the course of these interviews to be less confrontational. Using boundary work as a framework allowed me to approach subjects from the perspective of learning how they articulated their views rather than asking different versions of the question, “Are you a journalist?” during the entire interview.

Transcripts were initially coded around journalism themes. I coded for what Carlson (2015a) describes as “metajournalistic discourse.” He defines that term as one of the key ways actors “publicly engage in processes of establishing definitions, setting boundaries and rendering judgments about journalism’s legitimacy.” Interview questions focused on how in-house reporters related their professional practices to various aspects of journalism. For instance, discussions of the importance of accuracy were grouped together and coded for the various definitions proposed. These thematic findings were produced as memos that served as the basis for the data presented in these chapters. Topical coding yielded revealed the importance of journalism ethics in these interviews, and then the data were reanalyzed through that lens, focusing closely on declarative statements about in-house reporting and comparative statements between in-house and independent news practices.

Triangulation

Chapter 5 includes a case study of how in-house reporters covered athlete participation in 2014’s Black Lives Matter protests. This section combines interview data and textual analysis in an attempt to connect metajournalistic discourse with the content produced in response to an

unplanned news event. Sports and politics often remain separate, but their confrontation in this case offered a unique window into the operationalization of the professional values in-house reporters previously articulated.

The case study is not a methodology in itself, but rather “a choice of object to be studied. ... As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 1998, p. 86). The case study in Chapter 5 is an example of what Stake called as an instrumental case study, one undertaken with the aim of refining theory or better understanding a specific issue, the way in-house reporters’ journalistic identity dictated their actions in an unexpected situation. The case study combined interview data with textual analysis. The assumption underlying textual analysis is that it can provide insight into the ideologies of a given social formation (Foss, 2004). All texts are encoded with the set of unspoken assumptions that go into their creation. In the case of a story on an in-house website, the occupational ideology of the in-house reporter interacts with the structural pressures those writers feel within their workplace and the reporter’s assumptions about the expectations of the audience. All of those combine to shape the content.

Textual analyses are neither production nor reception studies, so they are limited in the claims they can make about a how a text is shaped and how it is received. Combining textual analysis with other methods allows for more robust claims through triangulation (Stake, 1998, p. 97). Blending of data types provides a multi-perspectival view of a research site (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 21). Some have criticized triangulation as seeking to claim that there can be an objective truth in an inherently subjective situation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Yet as Fetterman (1989) says, the process of triangulation allows a researcher to see what perspectives are shared across groups and what perspectives are unique to individuals. The

interpretive tradition urges researchers to see individual perspectives as inherently bounded by location within a social structure or organizational culture (Schwartzman, 1993). In this case, the personal articulations of journalistic identity interacted with the written product produced by the writer.

This project also engages in triangulation within Chapter 3, which explores how in-house reporters feel they fit into the sports media system. In addition to interview data, I use content analysis of team media guides – annual publications that include a range of information about a sports organization, including corporate directories – to determine how teams position their in-house reporters. I also analyzed each team’s website for the presence of specific news characteristics, such as titles listed under each article. I reviewed 92 team websites and 90 media guides (I was unable to obtain to a media guide for one NFL and one NHL teams). This data helps fully contextualize the identity claims in-house reporters make for themselves with the structures they work within.

Plan of the dissertation

The plan of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter 1 situates the in-house outlet within the context of the sports media system, which is being remade thanks to digital and interactive technologies. Sports sit on a shrinking list of mass cultural institutions that cut across demographic and geographic boundaries. Media discourse helps society make sense of sports. At the same time the analytic frames applied to sports are often generalized to other areas of society – sports analogies help us make sense of war and politics (Koppett, 1981). The production of sports media messages has wide impact, but has gone relatively understudied. Existing models of mediated sports, while still relevant, are rooted in pre-digital institutional relationships, occupational categories and message flows (Wenner, 1989). A new technological regime calls for a rethinking of how these actors constitute themselves and relate to each other. This includes

the sports journalist, which occupies a central place in a pre-digital media system model as the lone node connecting sports teams and media organizations to the audience. This no longer describes the sports journalist's place in the network.

Chapter 2 introduces the analytic framework of boundary work and describes how it has shaped perceptions of the sports journalist over time. Independent sports reporters have struggled to gain full professional recognition, often engaging in boundary work to protect their place in the field. They have done this in response to other journalists deploying the boundary work of expulsion against them. News-side reporters and others point to a frivolous subject matter and lax ethical practices as a means of locating sports reporters outside the boundaries of the profession. At the same time, sports journalists engage in boundary work to protect their own autonomy, drawing lines against outside challengers like bloggers or proponents of sports analytics. This longstanding credibility contest created the conditions for in-house reporters to claim commonality with members of the independent sports media.

Chapter 3 presents data on the boundary work of expansion in-house reporters engage in as they seek to extend the definition of journalism to include themselves. Interviewees who joined in-house outlets from independent ones understand themselves to be continuing their journalism careers, just in a new venue. This manifests in the relationships they have with the independent reporters they work alongside. Many described themselves as more like beat writers than any other category of media work; this was true even of people who never worked in independent newsrooms. Those younger reporters articulated weaker claims to a journalistic identity and saw the distinctions between journalism and other media fields as less important. It also describes how in-house reporters define themselves in relation to their own corporate cultures, uncovering how they use their professional self-concept and the team organizational

chart to assert a level of separation between themselves and the institution. This includes constructing a strict boundary between their work and team public relations departments, which they view as anathema to journalism.

Chapter 4 examines how in-house reporters define journalism and embed the profession's ethical principles into their own work. In-house reporters propose a definition of journalism in which accuracy is paramount and independence is highly personalized, both reasonable claims within the context of the profession. They contrast their definition of journalism with what they see as failures of independent reporting, especially in terms of accuracy and civility, using their own practices to question the ethics of independent media. In doing so, they engage in the boundary work of both expansion and expulsion.

Chapter 5 applies this identity construction and ethical discourse to the practice of breaking news, in which journalistic imperatives come into conflict with team control over information. Because many are forbidden from breaking news, in-house reporters downplay its importance of and even cast it as the source of ethical problems within the profession. The desire for scoops, putting news out before an official release, leads to inaccurate reporting. It then examines how in-house reporters cover an unexpected news story, in this case athletes engaging in political activism. In-house reporters took different approaches to covering these actions – from ignoring them to producing a full story – but used the language of news judgment to explain their divergent choices. The decisions in-house reporters made often conflicted with the organizational response to the protests, which in some way supports claims of journalistic independence. Yet in all cases, choices made by the reporters did seem to protect the team's brand, either by ignoring them or downplaying the oppositional nature of the players' actions.

Chapter 6 concludes by discussing the role of ethical discourse in how in-house reporters draw professional boundaries. It argues that normative accounts have long been central to journalism; journalism's claim to its jurisdiction has been based on the profession's role in enabling democracy and citizenship. I find that in-house reporters treat the ethics of accuracy and independence in isolation, separate principles rather than interconnected ways of achieving a normative goal. Building from work on the ethics of mixed media, I argue that all participants in public discussion spaces acquire ethical responsibilities, especially those who occupy institutional perches. But journalism ethics point practitioners toward specific normative goals, which are not shared by in-house reporters.

Conclusion

This matters because sports media often acts as a proving ground for new practices (Oates & Pauly, 2007). With native advertising and other forms of brand content growing more commonplace, the cultural meaning of what in-house reporters produce remains indeterminate (Bull, 2013). When Netflix commissions a story on how the prison system fails women in advance of a season of *Orange Is the New Black*, is the resulting story journalism about a largely invisible issue or a failure of the news-editorial wall that ultimately will diminish the profession (Sebastian, 2014)? In-house sports outlets represent a particularly well-developed example of this phenomenon, one which more closely mimics traditional news structures.

Others have experimented with this, although the results have been negative. Indiana's state government planned an in-house outlet that was abandoned after independent media and others objected to it on grounds that it looked like propaganda (LoBianco, 2015). Verizon started a short-lived technology news site, whose failure was attributed at least in part to its policy of avoiding controversial subjects like privacy (Brodkin, 2014). As Verizon learned with its reporting efforts and as this project shows in Chapter 5, it is impossible to cordon off softer news

like technology and sports from the important public debates they occasionally intersect with. But failures in the past do not guarantee failures in the future. If in-house sports media normalizes in-house reporting, how long will it be until other institutions attempt to build on those practices?

As best as I can tell, this represents the broadest examination of in-house sports media production yet undertaken. Three other scholarly works have looked at the professional identities of in-house sports media producers. Content producers for the New Zealand Rugby Federation viewed themselves as acting in a marketing role, working hard to promote the national rugby team and protect sponsorship agreements (Scherer & Jackson, 2008). They did not implicate journalism in their work. In the American context, Yanity (2013) described the job of a writer at a college athletic department's website as a hybrid role – combining journalism, public relations and athletic department functionary roles. The pilot study for this project found reporters practicing what they viewed as constrained journalism; writers in these roles oriented themselves toward the profession even as they managed the conflicts inherent in being team employees (Culver & Mirer, 2015). These previous studies have taken a more static approach to media fields, treating professional definitions as fixed rather than dynamic. This project adds to this line of research by embedding in-house media in the context of a shifting media system and changing conceptions of journalism.

New technologies, new voices, and new message flows require a reexamination of the assumptions that underpin media systems, both in sports and beyond. What journalism looks like in the digital age will, of course, be informed by what it looked like before. Journalism is a cultural category that many ascribe value to, even if they disagree on specifics. But those categories always are open to redefinition. The ideas Printers' Ink floated about how baseball

should transmit information to the public are only part of what has come to pass. Sports marketing is more sophisticated and multifaceted than it has ever been, and uses new information channels to reach fans. In-house outlets illustrate the role that news plays in involving people in sporting institutions. As independent news coverage recedes, teams are seeking to replace it themselves in both content and form.

This dissertation shines a light on how the people who produce this coverage understand themselves and communicate their professional identities to the public. In-house reporters identify strongly with journalists, pointing to their work practices and relationships with others in the sports media system as proof that they occupy a similar role. They say they adhere to journalism's ethical principles. They report the truth. They maintain the independence to set their own news agendas, rather than serving team messaging objectives. In doing so, many say they outstrip independent reporters on some ethical dimensions, pointing to what they see as independent sports media's increasing interest in speculation and its lack of civility. Their approach to breaking news does illustrate some of the complexity in their positions.

Yet the vision of professional authority they propose is essentially backward facing. Despite being creatures of digital media, in-house reporting valorizes pre-digital information flows, relationships that gave teams and journalists greater authority over sports news. The boundary work in-house reporters engage in does seek to carve out a place for themselves in journalism. Yet their expressions of professional identity locate power and information control in institutional actors, especially the teams. In-house reporters' articulations of journalism ethics fail to connect with the profession's overarching normative claim, which is that news enables citizenship and societal participation.

Chapter 1: The shifting sports-media system

In dramatic terms, the springtime release of the National Football League's schedule feels more like a pregame coin toss than a last-minute touchdown pass. The match-ups and locations of the games have been known since December, determined by rotation and order of finish during the previous year. The days and times of the games yield some new information. A set calendar lets fans start to plan ticket purchases and road trips, although television contracts allow game times to move at the request of the networks. Knowing the order of games helps fans start to imagine how the coming season will play out. They find out when their team may have to play in extreme weather – Miami in September or Green Bay in December – or when their favorite team faces especially difficult back-to-back games. The broadcast introduces some of the storylines that will drive media coverage during the season, such as when a coach or a quarterback returns to play his previous team. Learning what games have been selected for national television provides some insight into how the league office and its broadcast partners view each team. The NFL and the television networks want the most attractive teams playing in front of the largest broadcast audiences.

For most of its history, the NFL announced the schedule via press release. It garnered a ripple of press attention in a busy part of the sports calendar; two other professional leagues are holding their playoffs and a third is in the opening days of its schedule. Beginning in 2009, the NFL turned the schedule release into a media event. It created a primetime special on the cable channel it operates, the NFL Network, to release and analyze the slate of games. ESPN, the loudest voice in the sports media system, followed suit. As NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell described it:

We create a scheduling show for two hours to talk about our schedule for the upcoming season. Guess what? ESPN did the same thing. Good outcome for the NFL. We had a two-hour pre-game show; so did ESPN. We went to three. Guess what? ESPN went to

three. We went to four. I think they're about—they're on four. What (having the NFL Network) does is it raises the game. (via Koblin, 2013)

Despite being closer to the end of the previous season than the start of the next one, and with teams still assembling their rosters for the coming year, the NFL used its status as a broadcaster to claim a place on the sports media agenda. The value of this attention is difficult to quantify from the outside. But the commissioner's statement makes clear that claiming a share of the public's attention during its offseason matters to the league. The NFL's still fairly new status as a media company allows it to exert competitive pressures to achieve that objective.

This presupposes, of course, that ESPN and the NFL Network view themselves as competitors. That this is unclear points to the ways an influx of new actors into broadcast production have disrupted models of the sports-media system. On schedule release night, ESPN and the NFL Network are competing directly for the attention of football fans. In 2015, on a night in which other sports networks carried playoff hockey and basketball games, the schedule release show garnered almost 500,000 viewers across the NFL Network and ESPN (Sports TV Ratings, 2015). Competition mattered in this case. Sports fans tend to be purposive viewers of television (Rubin, 1984), meaning that when a network cedes viewers on the schedule release, it risks losing them for other events, such as the NFL Draft or the weekly pre- and post-game shows. Producing current news and credible analysis gives viewers a reason to watch when games are not being played (which in the NFL's case is most of the time). Even before addressing the messaging benefits, the financial incentives for growing an audience include higher advertising rates and carriage fees from cable systems.

At the same time, ESPN and the NFL Network's parent company are business partners. ESPN pays the NFL nearly \$2 billion per year to exclusively televise 17 Monday Night Football games, broadcast a postseason game, and license massive amounts of NFL footage (Sandomir,

2011). The NFL's overall profitability relies heavily on television rights contracts with ESPN and three other broadcast networks, which garner billions of dollars each year (Fortunato, 2013b). ESPN's profitability relies heavily on its access to NFL games, which allows it to charge the highest carriage fees of any cable network – more than \$6 per month in 2015 (Gaines, 2013; Miller & Shales, 2011; Ourand, 2014, 2015). This benefits the niche NFL Network, by allowing it to also charge higher fees (estimated at \$1.31 month in 2015) for a channel with limited appeal. The two outlets promote each other's broadcasts, which may build audiences for future games, but which come at the expense of whatever the promoting network would be showing at the same time. The NFL Network may care less about counterprogramming league content on ESPN than vice versa. But both appear to operate from the assumption that driving interest in the NFL, even if that means smaller audiences for baseball games on ESPN or Thursday night dramatic programming on networks, benefits everyone involved.

The sudden complication of this relationship points to larger shifts in the sports media landscape. Sports organizations, which for more than a century relied heavily on traditional media outlets to deliver messages to audiences, now may do that work themselves. All four major North American professional sports leagues and many college athletic conferences now run (either on their own or with a partner) a cable television network. These outlets use their singular focus, ownership of video archives and expanded access to players and coaches to produce information for broadcast. Though approaches and management structures vary (Brown, 2014; Holt, 2004; Kramer, 2006), the trend of in-sourcing media portrayal, of taking full control of messages about themselves, is growing.

This now applies to providing day-to-day information as well. Leagues, conferences and teams also operate internet and social media channels that produce news about themselves, doing

a job that used to be the sole province of sports journalists. Much of this in-house portrayal uses the genre conventions of sports journalism. In-house outlets produce game reports, injury updates, player news and, in some cases, opinion content. Both league and team outlets have hired reporters, often directly from independent newsrooms, to create this material and engage with fans. In-house reporters operate in a new space in the media landscape – using the practices of independent journalism in a non-independent context.

This is not entirely unique to sports. Native advertising is growing increasingly common, with brands using the Internet to deliver hybrid informational/promotional messages to consumers (Bull, 2013). Where brand content and native advertising are often techniques of specific promotional campaigns, the creation of dedicated news outlets and the hiring of fulltime reporting staff reflects a deeper commitment to media production. In-house outlets pose a different set of questions about media and journalism than a one-off story or set of stories.

Scholarly work on sports media has long relied on a model of production and distribution defined by Wenner (1989, p. 26), who mapped institutional relationships and message flows among a defined group of actors. His model describes the ways media organizations, sporting institutions, journalists and audiences interact to shape, deliver, consume and process mediated sports content. His model is transactional, describing an often cooperative relationship between institutions like the NFL and ESPN, which work together to produce mediated messages. Both interact with sports journalists, the people who are in charge of shaping messages for mass distribution. The audience receives those messages and interacts with sports and media organizations, often financially.

Wenner's model never addresses technology. From the other side of the digital transformation, however, the ways media technology conditioned these relationships is easier to

see. Barriers to entry into media production enforced clear boundaries between sports and media organizations. These arrangements generated a set of relationships and occupational roles, all of which have been altered by technological shifts. Nearly three decades after it was put forward in the book that launched the sub-discipline of sports communication, the model is showing its age. Wenner's model never satisfactorily addressed promotional communication, which was a large part of the system in the pre-digital era and has grown in an age of social media. But it now describes a diminishing amount of sports media content. Interactive media have amplified audience voices as well, creating two-way message flows that affect other actors in the system. Boundaries that were once clear are now increasingly blurred.

The sports media system is a site in which society makes sense of a key social institution. Sports are a common reference, an example of mass culture in a fragmented media environment. The ubiquity of games and sports also make them something we think with. Audiences deploy the frames from sports media to make sense of issues that go beyond athletics (Koppett, 1981). Sports media have long been a domain in which society has talked to itself about race, class, gender, economics, nation and many other topics. Locating this discourse in an explicitly promotional context will change how this conversation works. In-house media's entry into this arena opens a range of research questions, and informs much of Chapter 5.

The chapter explores the brand network in a systemic context. It opens with a discussion of how media shape our perception of the place of sports in society. It then traces the relationship between sports and media in the United States, recasting what has been previously described as a "symbiotic" connection as one of social shaping. It uses the embeddedness of both media and sports in communities to illustrate this point. It then will provide background on the rise of the brand outlet, including the ways in which it changes the business models of sports organizations

and reshuffles the media system. As boundaries crumble, various actors work to replace them and claim new occupational categories and roles. This chapter will conclude by sketching the contours of the current environment.

This sets up a discussion in Chapter 2 about the changing nature of sports journalism, which in-house media complicates in significant ways. Media ethics have long been at the core of how journalists define their profession, with sports coverage being viewed as compromised compared to other parts of the field. The shift in the economics of media creates new forms of compromise among journalists. The professional practices and ethical conduct of reporting staff at in-house outlets is itself a discourse on the practice of journalism. This has implications for the meaning of the profession more broadly. As the teams and players encroach on sports journalism's traditional role of taking audiences inside the game and locker room, determining what makes a sports journalist unique in the digital era is an urgent question, and not just because of its effects on the sporting landscape. Changes in the profession negotiated on the back pages often find their way to the front (Oates & Pauly, 2007).

Sports communication as culture

Think of a play during a football game. At the snap of the ball, 22 players go in motion. Some run, some block, some throw, some catch, some tackle. People sitting in the stands cheer or groan or maybe take pictures of scene. When the whistle blows and the action ends, the play itself evaporates. The action is ephemeral. In this way a game that takes place in an NFL stadium is no different than a high school or Pop Warner game. The NFL is a nearly \$13 billion business, but the action it is built around is fleeting. Media help give our games permanence, creating lasting records out of these brief moments in time, turning them into shared cultural moments.

Allen Guttman (1978, pp. 47–54) describes recordkeeping and quantification two of the distinguishing features of modern sport. Recordkeeping is built into our games. This is true even

at the most informal levels; lunchtime pick-up games often last until one team has scored a certain number of points. The players track the records as the games go on and keep tabs on who gets to play next. At the highest levels of sports, leagues or other sanctioning bodies deploy officials and referees to keep those records. When the whistle blows in an NFL stadium and the players have returned to their huddles or their sidelines, officials place the ball at the spot where it will be snapped next, and down markers on the sideline update, indicating the location of the ball, and how far the offense needs to travel to maintain possession, a record that lasts, at most, three more snaps. The crew also keeps time and tracks the score so the players know when the game will end. Quantification is a form of this recordkeeping. Those records become measurements, data about who ran for how many yards and who scored the most touchdowns.

Taken together, this work extends the scope of any given competition from one occurring on a single field to “others distant in time and space” (p. 51-2). Today’s greatest home run hitters are competing not just against the players on the field at the same time, but players in 2001, 1998, 1961 and 1927. Guttman focuses on world records in his elaboration of the concept, speaking primarily of the four-minute mile. But we may think in terms of the more mundane. At all levels of organized sports what starts as an action on the field ends as a record in some way. The media apparatus around sports was developed in order to spread those records.

Mediation takes many forms. Statistics crews document each play, entering relevant data into computers, which do the calculations that will become the way people make sense of a game. Statistics tell stories, settle bets, determine the outcome of fantasy leagues and explain who is winning and losing and why. Public relations practitioners collect this data and distribute it to journalists while also maintaining extensive record books, historical records of a team or sport. Film crews keep visual records that coaches, journalists and fans who pay for the privilege

can use to understand what happened in these maelstroms of activity. Journalists take notes and create written accounts for fans to read afterward. Radio announcers turn the action into descriptions that travel over the airwaves. Television crews broadcast the game from their idealized vantage points to the public. Photographers on the sidelines snap away, capturing and sharing still images of the action. The greatest moments in sports are gone in the blink of the eye. Through mediation they achieve permanence. A play that lasts three or four seconds before vanishing forever can become a cultural touchstone, a shared frame of reference. As Hall (2006) writes, an “event must become a story before it can become a communicative event” (p. 164).

The convening of all these actors to play, to watch, to keep records, to view them later speaks to the role sports play in contemporary society. There is nothing natural about this. Rather it is the outcome of a complex negotiation of societal values. Play, games and sport are a part of virtually all human societies (Frey & Eitzen, 1991). Yet the presence of sports and games in a society actually tells us very little. The meanings a society attaches to those games do tell us much more (Guttmann, 1978; Mandell, 1984). The first sportswriter may have been Homer, whose coverage of the hero Patroklos’ funeral games near the end of the *Iliad* provides inside information about how they were organized, who competed, who won, and why it all mattered (Guttmann, 1978, p. 20). To borrow the language of journalism, Homer provides the who, what, where, when, why and how of the funeral games, narrating a cultural for more contemporary audiences and leaving a record of how the ancient Greeks understood athletics (Dickie, 1984). There is a relatively straight line between this section of the foundational text of the Western canon and what shows up on our sports pages and websites today.

Media coverage of sports – from Homer’s epic to today’s tweets – reflects what James Carey (1995) described as the transmission and ritual views of communication. Transmission

communication describes information exchange; the score of a football game or the time run by the winner of the 100-meter dash. Ritual communication are messages through which a society transmits its values. But this boundary does not really separate messages; Carey argued that values were embedded in practice of information exchange itself. When media shares the most up-to-date information about who won, who lost and who plays tomorrow – transmission communication – it communicates messages about the meaning of sport within a society. We know the names and life stories of ancient Olympians, from nearly 2,800 years ago, because that information was deemed important enough to record and transmit (Young, 1984).

A society's values are shaped and spread communicatively, though news, art, religion, commerce and sports. But those values are not eternal. The meaning of sports within a community changes as members articulate new ideas about communal life (Dyreson, 1989; Gorn & Goldstein, 2004). For example, the "Muscular Christianity" movement of the mid-19th century helped people see connections between the body and spirituality, recasting sports as a healthy pursuit rather than sinful frivolity as the Puritans understood them (Ingrassia, 2012; Riess, 2012). Early baseball writers presented the game as an expression of Victorian values, rewarding thrift and hard work (Riess, 1999). In the hands of Henry Chadwick, the first newspaper sportswriter, baseball represented the emerging Progressive ideal, as writers and teams applied data and other techniques to form a better understanding of their corner of the world (Schiff, 2008; Tygiel, 2000). Sportswriters constructed sports stars as a reflection of individuality and traditional masculinity in opposition to the changes in professional life, especially the rise of the corporate order (Moore, 1996; Rader, 1983). More recently, in an era of big data and metrics, fans identify more with the managers and executives who control the fates of the men of action on the field (Oates, 2009). These shifts played out within the context of

sports growing into a consumer product, and media's development into a highly profitable business.

Mediated discourse about sports constructs athletics and athletes as analogies, ideal types and exemplars for society at large (Mandell, 1984; Oriard, 1993, 2001). Writers and broadcasters situate sports within more sweeping commentaries on social conditions. Again, there is nothing particularly modern about any of this. The ancient Olympics were a religious festival accompanied by a strong political dimension (Kidd, 2013). The results of footraces and the exploits of gladiators appeared in the *Acta Diruna* – state-produced Roman news reports published for a period during the empire; sports news was placed alongside political news, which embedded it in the daily life of Roman citizens (Emery & Emery, 1996; Pendelton, 1890). Technologies change, accelerating message flows and altering the relationships between distant actors, but the process, the communicative diffusion of ideas and values is constant. There is nothing intrinsic to sports that media distort (Allison, 2001; Rader, 1984). Rather societies articulate the meaning of sports through the media of the day. Debates about what sports ought to be really are discussions about what society's values and economics should be.

Mass media discourse about sports matters because the discursive frames deployed to make sense of them often serve as a template for thinking about situations beyond athletics. The casual invocation of sports analogies in business, politics and war – and vice versa – makes this important terrain (Koppett, 1981). The presentation of values and relationships within mediated sports content dramatize a very specific set of cultural norms (Jhally, 1989; Williams, 2006). Critical scholars point to the financial relationships involved, the way for-profit entities work together to shape the presentation. There undoubtedly is some truth to this, though it likely

oversimplifies matters. Sports and sports media are embedded in a larger system of values that inform how both are understood.

Homer was not a journalist. Rather he occupied a culturally defined role as oral storyteller. Today, journalists occupy a culturally defined position as well, producing accounts of current events according to a set of socially shaped norms for that role. Journalists use their definitions of ethical practice to make claims about the credibility of their work, which ideally is focused on giving citizens the information they need to be self-governing. This ethical account of professional practice may have, at times, blinded journalists to the ways cultural values informed their work. Newsworthiness is not something concrete, but rather a judgment rooted in one account of what is worth reporting and sharing. Yet the independence journalists believe they have allows them to make certain arguments on behalf of the work they produce. Much of what follows in Chapters 3-6 examines how in-house reporters' employment situations affect how they position their work ethically and what guides their assessments of newsworthiness.

Even as the digital era has opened up the sports media ecosystem, journalists, broadcasters and sports talk radio still play a major role in shaping perceptions of the sporting world. Legacy media tap into existing cultural understandings in order to make sense of unfolding events (Buffington, 2005; Butterworth, 2007; Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Trujillo & Ekdom, 1985; Trujillo, 1991). Team-employed strategic communicators have always authored some of this discourse, through marketing materials or local broadcasts. News content has been separate, influenced by team employees, but not authored by them. All of this "official" discourse accompanies fans' own observations. Virtually all games are broadcast live and fans are drawing their own conclusions as they watch. Meaning formation has never been a one-way street. In the pre-digital era, fan views often were invisible

on a mass scale except as they were reflected through actions or in the accounts of media producers. Increasingly they play a more central role, further reinforcing the systemic changes enabled by new technologies.

Structural changes to the media apparatus around sports therefore affect how society understands both sports and media. The factors that go into the production of mediated discourse about sports have received little scholarly attention, especially in comparison to the messages themselves (Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Plymire, 2005). The messages are the outcome of a production process, shaped by pressures that have been theorized more than they have been observed (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This project uses interview data to capture how in-house reporters understand the ways their employment arrangements shape their work lives and the content they produce.

[Theorizing the sports-media relationship](#)

It is difficult, therefore, to understand the place of sports in a society without fully accounting for the role of mass media. Robert McChesney's historical survey (1989) often serves as the starting point for discussions about how these institutions interact with each other. McChesney describes a "symbiotic" relationship between sports and media, with each contributing to interest in the other; sports fans consume media about their favorite teams, meaning that people who buy tickets and merchandise also seek out mediated news and game broadcasts. McChesney positions media as the controlling partner in this dyad, arguing that private media owners deploy sports coverage to achieve ideological objectives. Cheap and ostensibly apolitical, sports coverage distracts Americans from material realities. It is no surprise, in McChesney's estimation, that the Golden Age of Sports and what Robert Lipsyte (1975) called "The Golden Age of Sportswriting" coincided with the newspaper consolidation and an emerging corporate order. McChesney's argument views sports as an opiate of the masses

without considering what they mean as a social practice (Whannel, 1983). His view detaches sports and media from cultural currents as well as the economic and technological forces that shaped both institutions (Bryant & Holt, 2006).

Sports and media are both institutions of social cohesion. Organized sports require coordination and shared frames of reference among the participants (Guttmann, 1978; Mandell, 1984). Media, and especially journalism, helps foster this, providing common information so individuals can coordinate action. Sports fans share a common interest. They combine to form an audience, which news organizations have sought to avail themselves of through regular coverage. Looking at this through the lens of locality, the connections between sports and media appear more complex than they have been understood previously.

Sports, Media, Locality

When Alexis de Tocqueville (2004) toured the United States in the 1830s, he discovered a vibrant newspaper culture. Though conflicted about their content, he saw newspapers as a means of mass coordination, “A newspaper is not only able to suggest a common plan to many men; it provides them with the means of carrying out in common the plans that they have thought of for themselves” (p. 518). Publications proliferated in the United States between the revolution and the Jacksonian era and special-interest journals, including those about sports, were part of this rise of media (Betts, 1953). Early sporting publications, like the digital sports packages of today, relied on subscriptions and often focused on a single sport (Bryant & Holt, 2006). Early sports publications convened interest-based audiences rather than locally focused ones. They also, Betts writes, connected immigrants to their home countries, in that they often carried results of overseas sporting events.

American urbanization created new audiences for publications to serve. The penny press – precursor to the urban newspaper – emerged in the 1830s, addressing itself to the new form of citizenship developing in emerging metropolises (Schudson, 1978). Early newspapers covered sports, writes Betts, devoting significant resources to major horse races and boxing matches. The tone of the coverage, explored fully in Chapter 2, reflected conflicted ideas about the place of sports in American society (Ingrassia, 2012; Riess, 2012). When political parties withdrew their support for newspapers after the Civil War, publishers used sports coverage as one way of defining coherent urban identities as a means of expanding their readership (Kaniss, 1991).

Sporting institutions began to address themselves more directly to urban identity as well. Baseball, which developed in American cities, was the first mass-interest game, a departure from the class-bound sporting culture that had predominated until then (Adelman, 1997; Goldstein, 1989). It became a regular part of the urban newspaper in the 1850s (Betts, 1953; Schiff, 2008; Tygiel, 2000). As the sport professionalized, appeals to urban identity grew stronger. One key innovation of the National League was the granting of local monopolies so teams could have an uncontested space in which to market themselves (Goldstein, 1989). Team fortunes and stadium projects were often covered from the frame of civic pride, something that started in the late 19th century (Riess, 1999) and continues today (Delaney & Eckstein, 2008; Scherer & Davidson, 2010).

The rise of a more national media system following World War I enabled new social bonds to form around mass culture, including sports (Cohen, 1990). Sports served as a social lubricant that enabled working class Chicago to form multiethnic political alliances, Cohen writes. Political groups and unions scheduled meetings around sporting events to ensure broad attendance. That rise of national media also manifested in newspapers through syndication. Babe

Ruth appeared in the syndicated work of sports journalists like Grantland Rice, helping them both build national followings (Fountain, 1993; Ponce de Leon, 2002). Cohen points to the shared text that radio became, but one of the key moments in its diffusion was the 1926 heavyweight championship bout between Gene Tunney and Jack Dempsey, which was credited for the sale of nearly 100,000 sets in New York City alone (Otto, Metz, & Ensmenger, 2011). Media investment also set the terms of engagement for broadcasters in the 1920s. Privately owned radio stations displaced public media partly through capturing the rights to college football, helping codify a for-profit system (O'Toole, 2010). Seeking exclusivity also carved out an intellectual property regime that established ownership over sports broadcasts (Garrett & Hochberg, 1983). This has been crucial in forming the modern media system.

Television's effect on the sporting landscape has been enormous. Escalating media rights fees have reoriented sports business models away from gate receipts toward television dollars (Bellamy, 1989). The influx of media money occurred in multiple ways. From 1961 through the late 1980s national rights fees from television networks steadily escalated, attracting billions into sports organizations (Bellamy, 1989; Fortunato, 2001, 2006, 2013c; Garrett & Hochberg, 1983; Horowitz, 1977). At the same time, leagues moved to protect local broadcasting rights, preserving revenue streams for each club by reinforcing the monopoly system baseball perfected (Fortunato, 2001).

The broadcast networks' enthusiasm for paying rights fees flagged in the early 1990s, but cable television networks stepped in, paying more money and showing more games (Gunther & Carter, 1988). This allowed these smaller networks to distinguish themselves and build a distinct identity (Miller & Shales, 2011). More recently local television contracts and regional sports networks have become important sources of revenue for teams. Virtually every game in the four

major North American professional sports leagues is televised. Teams and leagues increasingly hold ownership stakes in these outlets, opening up dual revenue streams. This profitability may come at the cost of reach. Cable audiences are smaller than broadcast ones. Sports remain a broad niche in an era of declining audiences, but the move to cable has made them a niche.

Sports' accommodations to the demands of television are significant. Teams arrange the physical space in arenas to accommodate the needs of broadcasters (Fortunato, 2001; Whannel, 1992). The rules of games have been changed and their flow broken up to build excitement or allow for commercial breaks (Parente, 1977). Leagues alter schedules and start times to make the most attractive match-ups more widely available (Chandler, 1991; Fortunato, 2008). Leagues choose the location of teams with television markets in mind (Crupi, 2015). Entire leagues – the American Football League and United States Football League are two examples – started, in part, so team owners could capture the television money from broadcast rights (Fortunato, 2006).

News organizations have long understood sports content as a circulation builder (Woodward, 1949). Sociologists see it more as a community builder. Park (1940) viewed sports coverage and other hallmarks of “yellow” journalism as helpful in bringing the less educated into local media, which anchored them in their communities. Sports continues to serve this function even as suburbanization changed what audience want from their news sources. Suburban Philadelphia readers care less about city politics or neighborhood news in distant communities, but they still care deeply about whether the Phillies won last night (Anderson, 2013a; Kaniss, 1991).

Media still seek to construct local sports teams as reflections of local identity in an effort to construct a fan community (Brawley, 2012; Delaney & Eckstein, 2003; Ingham & McDonald, 2003; Scherer & Davidson, 2010). Teams also define themselves around their local communities,

even in sports like soccer, where national and international fandom is growing more common (Crolley, 2008; Edensor & Millington, 2008). North American sports teams and most newspapers usually lead with a city name, immediately placing themselves in a local context (Buchanan, 2009). They address themselves to a group's shared ideas of citizenship. Independent news outlets try to create a shared text for people in a community, with teams locally marketing themselves using values expressed in that coverage and other civic rituals.

The community that in-house media addresses itself to is interest-based not reliant on civic or geographic boundaries. Fans of a given team may live 10 minutes from the home venue or 10 time zones away. Some interview subjects for this project described being in regular contact with fans living abroad, people who would have no reason to visit a local newspaper other than for news about the team they follow. In-house media may be more efficient for those fans. As we will see in Chapter 5, when in-house reporters were faced with a wave of social protests, the uncertainty about who they are addressing in their coverage to affects the choices they made. Journalism defines itself normatively, through ethical discourse (Singer, 2015). Journalism ethics guide the work of reporters in the direction of supporting civic engagement and participation. How do people who view themselves as journalists make coverage choices when addressing an audience where engagement and participation are defined commercially rather than politically?

To speak of the sports-media relationship as symbiotic, as McChesney does, tells a correct, but incomplete story. Clearly sports organizations and media institutions have helped each other grow and profit over the course of two centuries. That said, this relationship has operated within the context of changing conceptions of community and evolving media technology. Media coverage anchors sports teams in their localities, making them something

broadly shared across diverse audiences. Moreover media anchor sports in the broader society, providing games and teams with cultural meaning. Weakening these links represents a significant change.

The in-house outlet

The rise of cable outlets also saw sports teams begin to exert more direct control over their media partners. In 1995, an article in *Advertising Age* described a new division of Nielsen aimed at handling, “pro sports leagues that consider themselves more akin to media companies than anything else” (Jensen, 1995). Teams and leagues expanded their business partnerships with media entities during the 1990s, as changing ownership dynamics and the rise of digital cable television remade their relationships (Bellamy, 1998). The Internet opened new avenues for teams and leagues to create their own content as well. Websites started primarily as digital storefronts, but have gradually become information portals (Yanity, 2013). The in-house network reflects the next step in this march, one in which sporting organizations have themselves become “media powers” (Bellamy, 2012). The NBA launched its own television channel in 1999, a partnership with Time-Warner’s Turner Sports, opening the era of explicit brand cable broadcasting; the other three professional leagues joined them in the intervening years.

Teams’ entry into media production was accompanied by the adoption of news reporting. In 2000, the NFL’s Cincinnati Bengals hired Geoff Hobson away from a local newspaper to produce news content directly for the team’s website (Jenkins, 2000). Mlb.com started hiring beat writers for all of its 30 teams in 2001. News served as a means of attracting people to team websites where they could purchase tickets and access to radio broadcasts from anywhere on the globe (Holt, 2004). Mlb.com’s news operation claims editorial independence and was designed by Dinn Mann, a former newspaper sports editor who has overseen the department since the

beginning. He said he believed mlb.com's reporters provided clearer insight with less bias than is found in independent outlets.

Somewhere in the 80s, reporters got a little bit more in the way of attitude and a little bit less in the way of letting people know what was going on out there ... I really thought this would be a hit with the fans long before it was a hit with people inside the media (Pells & Newberry, 2009).

Mlb.com boasts an impressive array of writers, many with national reputations like Peter Gammons (formerly of the Boston Globe and ESPN) and Richard Justice (formerly of the Washington Post and Houston Chronicle). Many of its team beat writers come from newspaper backgrounds. The site's online strategy has been massively successful, with its media arm posting significant profits (Brown, 2014).

Teams and leagues gradually built up their media operations during the first decade of the 21st century. National Hockey League teams were the most aggressive in the face of declining coverage in local newspapers (Perez-Pena, 2009). After the only paper that covered them fulltime went behind a paywall, the New York Islanders hired a team public relations executive to blog independently about the club for a year, before cutting ties (Hackel, 2010). In 2009, the Los Angeles Kings hired a beat writer away from a local newspaper to much fanfare. Professional teams without in-house reporters have become the exception rather than the norm (see Chapter 3). In-house outlets market themselves as stepping into the hole created by cutbacks in independent coverage. In 2010, the Seattle Mariners promoted the fact that its website would be the only outlet sending a beat writer on a late-season road trip once the team was out of postseason contention (Adamack, 2010). This underlines how important newspaper coverage has been to sports teams.

The factors that have made sports such a valuable media property also make sports a good candidate for in-house media outlets. Fandom has been understood in the context of social

identity theory, meaning fans stay loyal to their teams and consistently consume news and television broadcasts (Tajfel, 1982; Wann & Branscombe, 1992, 1995; Wann, 2006). Sports fans are instrumental viewers of television, defined as those who seek out programming so they can acquire topics for later discussion (Rubin, 1984; Wenner & Gantz, 1998). Fans make appointments to watch their favorite teams and derive enjoyment from the rituals of the game (Zillman, Bryant, & Spolsky, 1989). Those who follow sports through the media tend to be young and male, demographics attractive to advertisers, but also difficult to reach (Fortunato, 2001; Wenner, 1989). Sports deliver consistent audiences, and they do so live, meaning fans also watch commercials rather than skipping them as DVR watchers tend to do (Fortunato, 2013b). Fan practices around social media, such as the use of second screens, add to the value of media rights (Billings, 2014). Those watching live can enjoy the unfolding action as they take part in a multi-way conversation going on through Twitter or other outlets.

The economics of cable television made the move by teams into media production profitable. While broadcast television networks have one stream of income – advertising – ESPN ensured that cable channels also make money on a per subscriber basis (Miller & Shales, 2011, pp. 110–113). One estimate suggests that about 60 percent of ESPN’s revenue comes from subscription fees, far outstripping its ad revenues (Gaines, 2013). In-house broadcast outlets give leagues access to this revenue stream. In-house online outlets bring readers into team’s website, leading to ticket and merchandise purchases. Interviews for this project found that some in-house outlets also produce sponsored content, opening up a new revenue stream to teams as well.

At the same time, in-house media outlets extend the value of sponsorship, which is the other major revenue stream for sports organizations beyond television rights (Fortunato, 2013a). Sponsorship has become increasingly important in an era of advertising avoidance. Working

with teams allows companies to tap into a loyal customer base (Cornwall, 2008; Fortunato, 2013a). Companies like Nike and Gatorade buy commercial time as part of their sponsorship arrangement with the NBA, but they also get plenty of air time because they are in use during a basketball game (Fortunato, 2001). The NFL requires its sponsors to buy commercial time on the NFL Network and advertising space on its website. Fans form strong relationships to their teams, and a brand that embeds itself in that relationship may reap strong benefits. Fans may view consumption of a specific product as a marker of fan group identity (Madriral, 2000). Alternatively they may view a brand in a better light because of its association with a team or league (Harvey, 2001). Though I have not seen any empirical studies to this effect, it seems a decent hypothesis that exposure on an in-house outlet network may potentially further entwine a brand and sports property in the minds of fans.

The business case for the in-house outlet seems relatively straightforward, but their impact is more than financial. These outlets help break down divisions of labor between sporting institutions and media organizations. These changing relationships call for a reexamination of the way these actors transact and how they constitute themselves. For a sports organization to become a media producer changes what we think of when we discuss both those things. The effects on professional roles within that system will be explored in the coming chapters. I will conclude this section with a discussion of what is missing from models of the sports-media system and calling for a new approach to understanding it.

Modeling the sports-media system

Lawrence Wenner's transactional model of the mediated sports production complex (1989, p. 26) convenes a series of actors – athletic institutions, journalists, and media organizations – who effectively produce the sports experience for the audience through the

creation of mediated content. Sporting organizations and media outlets interact with each other and with sports journalists to produce mediated texts. Sports journalists prepare these texts and deliver them to an audience, which processes those messages. These relationships are entirely contained within what Wenner calls “society,” which applies pressures on these actors and their relationships. Sports media are a site for discussions of a range of issues that might fall under the umbrella of society. Meanwhile shared ideas like journalistic professionalism or corporate responsibility affect the ways actors operate within the system. Wenner’s model moved the study of sports media forward, but missed key components of the system as they existed in 1989, which limits its explanatory power in the internet era.

John Fortunato’s *The Ultimate Assist* (2001) provides perhaps the fullest account of how Wenner’s model works in practice, but also captures its basic shortcomings. Fortunato describes changes in the National Basketball Association’s media strategy in 1980s and 90s, which helped the struggling league grow into a major cultural institution. The NBA and its broadcast partners worked together to shape both the exposure the league received and the ways it and its players were portrayed in that coverage. This includes everything from selecting the best games to be shown nationally to the constructing a new visual language of basketball in telecasts that emphasized the intricacies of game (p. 101). It also worked closely with journalists to shape day-to-day coverage of the league. In the partnership Fortunato presents, the league and the networks maintain a clear division of labor, especially when it comes to news content (p. 155). But that process was helped along by sponsorship dollars, which contribute messages and money to the system that go unaccounted for.

Promotional media as an actor

Sponsors play a major role in marketing sports leagues and athletes, exerting influence over transactions between other actors in the system. For example, Monday Night Football –

considered by many to be a watershed moment in sports television – was a partnership between the NFL, ABC and Ford Motor Company (Gunther & Carter, 1988). Without the sponsorship money from Ford, this highly influential part of television history, a major cultural moment, never would have existed. The failure to account for promotional communication compounds in the digital era. Team and league sponsors continue to purchase air time and online ad space to make the connections between teams and media outlets profitable (Fortunato, 2013a). Players and teams use promotional content to build their own brands often through the same media platforms reporters use to share news. Promotion has been walled off within the study of sports communication, a boundary that makes sense for some questions, but not for others.

In reality, sponsorship and advertising have long subsidized sports institutions and media. Sporting goods companies advertised regularly in early sports newspapers in order to reach fans and potential players (Schiff, 2008). With newspapers and radio broadcasters largely controlling the channels of communication between the sporting institutions and their preferred audiences, the practice of public relations represented the primary means through which teams and league shaped perceptions about themselves. In the 1920s, publicity men like boxing promoter Tex Rickard played a major role in the expansion of the sport, turning boxers into personalities and creating media events to drive up gate receipts for his fights (Evensen, 1993). The long training camps in advance of fights he promoted turned into extended media availabilities, filling newspaper column inches. The most famous lede paragraph in the history of sports journalism may be Grantland Rice's "Four Horseman" story, in which he compares Notre Dame's offensive backfield¹ to biblical figures. Yet in an interview many years later, the school's publicity

¹ "Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden." (From the New York Herald-Tribune, October 18, 1924)

assistant claimed he fed Rice the idea (Holtzman, 1973, pp. 147–48). Promotional materials for major events like the Olympics often found their way into coverage of sporting events (Dinces, 2005).

And even in the 1920s, athletes were doing the sort of marketing we associate only with the Twitter era. Babe Ruth made movies in which a character loosely based on himself embodied important American values (Trimble, 1996). The practice of ghostwriting, in which athletes “penned” expert analysis of important games was a regular feature in mid-century American newspapers (Roessner, 2014). Athlete-bylined articles even appeared the on the sports page of the Communist Party newspaper the *Daily Worker*² (Silber & Rodney, 2003). These types of stories helped create mediated personalities that became part of the cultural representation of sports.

In the electronic era, sports teams and leagues developed their own media arms to produce promotional content. In the 1960s, the NFL bought the company that became NFL Films, whose productions helped cement the league’s cultural position (Vogan, 2014). NBA Entertainment also produced home videos for fan consumption as well as some specialized ancillary programming that was shown by the league’s broadcast partners (Fortunato, 2001). Yet for much of their history, these in-house production companies relied on their television partners for mass distribution of their content. For many years, Monday Night Football incorporated NFL Films highlights into its halftime show (Gunther & Carter, 1988). In the era of the in-house outlet, this work fills the hours between games and seasons. So too does news content.

² Lester Rodney, the sports editor of the Communist Party’s newspaper, wrote that the Dartmouth-educated Red Rolfe actually wrote his columns for the newspaper.

New actors, new message flows

Promotional content's long history in sports media should not detract from the way interactive tools are reshaping the communication network. Athletes do not appear in Wenner's model at all, but they now can speak directly to the public in their own voices using interactive media (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2014). Meanwhile, the audience is no longer just receiving messages. Social media allows them to participate in coverage and promotions, giving people at home the ability to shape the behavior of other actors in the system. Twitter may lack the reach of other media platforms, but hashtag campaigns like #NBCFail or #SochiProblems, launched in response to media coverage of the Olympics, show that audience-produced content can force action on the part of broadcasters or sports institutions (Billings, 2014; Girginova, 2015). In those cases social media messages caught the attention of traditional media, which led to changes by institutional actors.

At the same time, the model defines actors and roles that no longer appear to match their real-world counterparts. The clear delineation between sports and media organizations described by Wenner no longer seems as clear. In-house news content represents a further step into media production by leagues and teams. New alignments are appearing regularly. In August of 2015, the digital media arm of Major League Baseball bought the rights to stream games and produce in-house content for the National Hockey League's official sites (Wyshinski, 2015). Rather than partner with a traditional media company, hockey signed up with a subsidiary of another sports league. Digital media revenue represent an increasingly large part of Major League Baseball's profitability (Brown, 2014). The country's oldest professional sports league may be transforming itself into a media company that dabbles in baseball.

Toward a new model of the sports-media system

The media and sports businesses have helped grow each other's bottom lines for two centuries, but they both were responding to similar economic transformations, social shifts and technological conditions. With the rise of digital media, the boundaries between media and sports organizations have been revealed as more technological than intrinsic. This raises important questions about how our cultural conversation about sports and understanding of the role of media will change. Will these shifts divorce sports from locality? Will the move to more specialized channels erode the position of sports as a shared cultural text by gradually paring down audiences? And how will the entry into the media business by sports teams and leagues affect shared cultural categories around information? Divisions of labor created in the pre-digital era are now under pressure, affecting the ways media professionals and audiences understand those jobs. Journalists are just one aspect of this change, but an important one, given that this job category has claimed the authority to explain parts of the world to its audiences.

To be a sports fan on any level is to plug into an information network. Fans of the Green Bay Packers may read many of the same news sources, listen to the same radio voices, consume many of the same advertisements, purchase similar products, follow the same people on social media, and engage in off-line discussion about the team. Models simplify relationships, but in a moment when many of the old boundaries are breaking down, parsimony detracts from the accuracy of the sports-media model. Sports communication as an emerging discipline faces the challenge of understanding how this multiplicity of messages fits together. The breaking down of institutional boundaries, the influx of new actors, rewired message flows enabled by new technology and shifting occupational jurisdictions point to the need for a more comprehensive and integrated model of the sports media system. The answers may inform discussions beyond sports.

Promotional messages, social media messages and legacy media messages all travel through system, bumping into and shaping each other. The audience is now an actor in this process. It still makes sense to study marketing messages and journalistic messages on their own terms; questions of identity or credibility remain important. But on a systemic level, it also is important to understand how these messages, their producers and their receivers interact with each other. Sports are an important cultural institution, with an increasingly complex network of voices doing the work of making sense of them. In this newly open environment all definitions are now open to reinterpretation. Part of making sense of a more chaotic media environment is understanding how the conduits of information construct themselves and claim authority. In doing so, they address themselves to existing cultural categories while at the same time redefining them.

The rest of this project approaches the journalistic end of this chaotic set of relationships. The sports journalist is a key, if perhaps insufficiently defined, actor in most descriptions of the sports media system. In Wenner's model the sports journalist stands as an actor apart from both media and sports organizations, interacting with both and serving a pass-through for information that reaches the audience. Wenner (1989) conceives of the sports journalist as:

Servant to many. Professional ethics call on the sports journalist to report the news accurately and fairly to the audience. At the same time, the sports journalist often reports for a media organization that may make stylistic or substantive demands on that reporting. And finally, the sports journalist must remain on good terms with sports organizations, their teams, players, coaches, and other personnel, for without access to these sources, there is no access to the "inside story" that is so valued by the mediated sports audience (p. 38).

Yet we know that while the sports journalist plays this role in the media system, he is no longer is doing so alone. The sole jurisdiction over this work is gone.

The sports journalist's relationship with the audience, the news industry and sports organizations have all been remade thanks to technological shifts. The audience is no longer simply a consumer of messages, but rather a conversation partner. Teams and players are both sources and competition. News production is now housed in different sorts of business models, including the teams themselves. If professional ideology and ethical standards set the sports journalist apart in the past, do those distinctions still hold in the context of new employment relationships? The role of the sports journalist in these new arrangements will be the primary focus of the chapters to come. The answers will contribute to the discussion of what journalism means in an era with a more open media system, one in which the people who used to understand themselves as journalists no longer exert exclusive control over information channels.

Chapter 2: Lines drawn in chalk: Sports journalism and boundary work from 1856 to today

Chapter 1 argued that existing models of the sports media system were better suited to the pre-digital era. They describe actors, information flows and occupational categories from a period of unidirectional communication and monopoly control of message channels.

Technological constraints on the tools of publication and distribution enforced a division of labor among participants in the media system. Sports organizations, media institutions, journalists and the audience all occupied defined roles with relatively clear boundaries. To put it another way, each had a clear jurisdictions over various functions in the sports media system. In 1989, and beyond, teams and leagues relied mostly on mass media to disseminate game broadcasts and information. Newspapers, television and radio sat alone at the center of local and national information networks, exercising a true gatekeeping function.

Legacy media still occupy an important role in those networks. Game broadcasts remain more or less exclusive. Newspapers and television amplify information in ways more personalized or targeted channels cannot. But legacy media's control of the news reporting function has diminished. New voices are providing information outside of traditional sports news routines. Players are posting about signing new contracts, even before teams or agents can push that news out through journalists (Dodson, 2015). The NFL Network's "Insider" sometimes tweets in-game injury information ahead of formal announcement to the independent beat writers sitting in the press box (Rapoport, 2015; Wilde, 2015). Journalists used to compete against each other for the chance to transmit information to the public first. They maintained what Andrew Abbott (1988) calls jurisdiction over news. Now that realm of competition has expanded. Rather than being the only node connecting institutional actors and the sports audience, independent reporters are now one of several.

This is not unique to sports. Journalists throughout the news industry have seen their jurisdictions erode in the digital era, but this may be more pronounced in sports media. Independent journalists produce news alongside voices with varying claims to professionalism. Some are the participants themselves, with players, coaches and team executives using social media and outlets like the Players' Tribune to circumvent the press. Some are traditional bloggers, who produce content based on little access. And some now are team and league employees, producing information in the style of journalism and even claiming to be members of the profession. Drawing a paycheck from the people you cover may not sound like journalism to many. But defining journalism is more complicated than it looks.

“Sports journalism” as a category describes a set of relationships between actors that first formed just before the Civil War. The creation and maintenance of this category has been an active process on the part of sports journalists requiring the agreement of sports organizations, media institutions and the public. The process of building and maintaining this category represents what Thomas Gieryn (1983) calls “boundary work.” This term refers to the ways an occupational group polices its boundaries in order to either protect authority over a specific societal role or expel interlopers and norm violators. Through demarcation, a group asserts its uniqueness and indispensability in fulfilling a societal function. Outsiders also may engage in boundary work, articulating new definitions of a profession or jurisdiction they seek to access. In-house sports reporters are engaged in this process, stressing the ways they are similar to and, in their telling, more rigorous than independent journalists in order claim a place in the field.

As will be shown in Chapters 3-6 some methods of doing this include stressing similarities in work practices with independent reporters and drawing boundaries between themselves and their team coworkers, especially those who work in strategic messaging. They

also speak in the language of journalism ethics, articulating definitions of truth and independence that they can fulfill. Their definitional claims also point to instances when independent reporters fall short of ethical standards, such as reporting unconfirmed information. This ethical account may stray from journalism's normative justification. But sports journalism has always fit uncomfortably within that mission. This chapter argues that in-house reporters are aided in their efforts to expand professional boundaries by sports journalism's controversial status in the field. I will begin by introducing the idea of boundary work, which is drawn from the sociology of science and is a recent import into journalism studies. It will then construct the history of sports journalism through the lens of boundary work, looking at the ways sports journalists have sought to preserve their place in the profession and repel challenges to their own status.

Journalism's shifting jurisdiction

Accounts of emerging professions often tell an evolutionary story, but only partially apply that analogy (Abbott, 1988). These narratives stress regular adaptation, including the acquisition of new traits like ethics codes or formal training programs, leading toward the successful end goal of profession status. What those origin stories leave out, sociologist Andrew Abbott argues, is the role of competition for resources and niches that drives evolutionary change. In nature organisms adapt in response to changes in the environment. Professions do so in response to pressures from groups seeking to outcompete them for control over a societal niche. He describes these niches as jurisdictions, societal functions professional groups claim for themselves and deny to others. Part of the purpose of formalized professional groups is to manage their jurisdiction, either by growing it or keeping others out.

Journalism cohered as a discipline in the late nineteenth century, defining itself in opposition to the sensationalists, partisans and reformers of the era (Nerone, 2013). From the end of the Civil War through the early 20th century, journalists in the United States assumed control

over the production of news, developing what Schudson (1978) described as a “shared world of work” (p. 70) across newspapers. Journalists began describing themselves as a distinct occupational group as early as the 1880s, but the contours of the claim bent with changing intellectual currents, writes Schudson. Understandings of the meaning of truth and the individual’s relationship to the state evolved significantly during the Progressive era, and journalism defined itself in relation to that. The language of truth was a constant, but it was only after the nation’s experience with propaganda during World War I that journalists adopted the ideal of objectivity and the ethics codes that defined professional values in the high-modern era (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). These values demarcated journalism from the expanding publicity industry (Abbott, 1988, p. 225). Post World War II, affirmations of social responsibility were a response to the massive profits and diminishing competition in the news business (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

Yet even when news organizations were economically strong, journalism never met many of the classic definitions of profession (Singer, 2003). Journalists never controlled their own workplaces, resisted licensing requirements and lacked a body of esoteric knowledge, all traits associated with medicine and law, the classic professions. Some have questioned whether professionalism has been the best way to think about journalism (Zelizer, 1993). The factors that bolstered journalism’s view of itself as a profession now appear to have been at least partially technologically determined.

Print-only newspapers and limited broadcast spectrums insulated journalists from external pressures and limited the amount of competition they faced. Media companies profitably positioned themselves between message senders and their audiences, an arrangement that subsidized journalism for much of the 20th century. To reach the public with a message – be it a

political claim or a yard sale – one needed to either buy advertising space from a media organization or attract the interest of a journalist.

Digital technology eroded legacy media's control over the channels of communication, creating an economic challenge for media companies and a professional one for journalists (Singer, 2003). If, theoretically, anyone with a blog could report and distribute news, what made professional journalists different? Early debates over which new actors count as journalists, initial attempts at boundary work, have receded, although not because the answer to the question "who is a journalist" has become any clearer (Lowrey, 2006; Rosen, 2005). It is tempting to say the massive layoffs of reporters that accompanied falling newspaper circulations suggest that the market has weighed in on the importance of journalistic professionalism (see Kian & Zimmerman, 2012 for an overview of job losses to that point, the situation has not changed much since then). Yet the persistent claims of media bias in many quarters suggest that cultural accounts of news do not correspond with market's verdict (Leibovich, 2015).

Abbott views the histories of professions that stress gradual change as examples of winners writing history. These stories assume the current shape of an occupational group as ideal, and see its formation over time as a positive progression toward something more perfect. Understanding the medical profession as the result of "natural" processes of improvement obscures the ways doctors have outcompeted chiropractors, homeopaths and others for jurisdiction over the health of the human body (Starr, 1982). It writes competition out of the story in part because professionalism denies that legitimate competition could ever have existed.

Part of the work of a profession, Abbott says, is tending to its jurisdiction, either expanding to new domains or protecting against interlopers (p. 9). Jurisdictional claims can be incredibly powerful, helping structure the ways societies understand specific cultural practices.

“In claiming jurisdiction, a profession asks society to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights; jurisdiction has not only a culture, but also a social structure,” Abbott writes (p. 59). Yet jurisdictional claims are merely arguments, and ones that may be successfully rebutted or simply stop making sense. This leads to a group losing its jurisdiction. Technological change, for instance, leads to the destructions of old tasks and the creation of new ones, ending some jurisdictions while inventing others. Just as climate change alters niches in the natural world, technological change reconfigures niches in the social world. That may sound familiar to scholars of journalism. As described above, journalism claimed its niche using a normative account, defining its approach to information as superior to others in keeping the public informed.

Boundary work

Sociologist Thomas Gieryn (1983) argues that professional groups define themselves and claim jurisdiction through a practical process of demarcation. Employing what he calls boundary work, professions use the resources at their disposal to claim and protect their jurisdictions. In drawing distinctions or blurring them, a professional group makes claims about its value to the society. Professional groups define themselves, in part, by articulating distinctions between themselves and others.

Boundary work can be seen most readily during what Gieryn terms credibility contests, moments in which jurisdictional control becomes unclear. During credibility contests, boundary work reveals itself as a strategic practice, with professions stressing the aspects of their ideology best positioned to address an incoming threat. Gieryn’s work focuses on how scientists have done this, showing the ways they have articulated different definitions in response to specific challenges. For instance, when distinguishing themselves from phrenologists in 1830s

Edinburgh, scientists stressed the practical nature and limited claims of their work to dismiss the competitors as religion in disguise. But when faced with a challenge from engineers a few decades later, they argued that the practicality of engineering was too limiting. Mechanics addressed themselves to mundane problems while scientists produced knowledge, a higher pursuit. The boundaries of science shift constantly because the field itself is not fixed, but rather a broadly shared idea.

Gieryn defines three categories of boundary work – expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy. Expansion occurs when a professional group stakes claim to a jurisdiction, whether that niche is already occupied or not. Expulsion describes when a professional group mobilizes to deny entry to outsiders or dismiss norm-violators. Protection of autonomy is defined as the group resisting external threats to all or part of its jurisdiction. The outcomes of these credibility contests define a cultural space that “is a vessel of authority, but what it holds inside can only be known after the contest ends, when trust and credibility have been located here, but not there” (Gieryn, 1999 p. 15).

The vision of professionalism boundary work illuminates is not one of a closed group making decisions on its own. Rather, it embeds professions in their societies, pointing out the ways they address their definitional claims to various stakeholders including the public. This does not mean that science (or law or journalism) is just politics by other means. Professionals believe their group delivers significant benefits to the broader society. But that profession must convince the public of its value in order to have its claim of jurisdiction recognized. Gieryn (1999) describes boundary work as “cultural cartography,” in which a professional group seeks to draw strict borders between societal roles, divvying up control. Science won its current societal position because it convinced enough people to accept scientists’ map of cultural

authority. Other professions and the public accept its claims. Jurisdictional claims may be authored by closed groups, but they require the society at large to accept them. And those who grew up with maps that included something called the Soviet Union can attest that boundaries change.

Journalism and boundaries

The last two decades represent an extended credibility contest for journalism. Its already permeable boundaries made it especially prone to external challenges (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005). Throughout the 20th century journalism accommodated, perhaps grudgingly, new types of members as radio and television joined the media mix. Digital media made it easier for amateurs to report news and analyze current events, challenging the traditional markers of journalistic professionalism. Debates about who does not or does not count as a journalist are a sign that “In spite of the looseness of journalism as a distinct activity, journalists very much view their work as a practice of great social importance and defend it against incursions from non-journalists” (Carlson, 2015b, p. 8). Complaints about media bias along the ideological spectrum would suggest that non-journalists also view the profession as important. Understanding how media workers of all stripes and members of the public articulate the boundaries of the profession has important implications.

Yet even those in the profession have a difficult time agreeing what makes journalism unique. This reflects the way journalism is “not a solid, stable, thing to point to, but a constantly shifting denotation applied differently depending on context,” writes Carlson. “Whatever is distinct about journalism must be continuously constructed” (p. 3). This echoes Gieryn’s description of science, and indeed, Carlson argues that the ways journalists have gone about protecting their profession correspond directly with Gieryn’s typologies of boundary work – expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy.

Journalists no longer exert full control over news spaces and must incorporate the audience into news practices in ways that can feel uncomfortable (Gillmor, 2006; S. C. Lewis, 2012). The role of the journalist is no longer to merely report and publish, but also to orchestrate a conversation and incorporate that feedback into future work (Robinson, 2011). The central practices of journalism, which helped define the profession in its early days have been called into question (Schudson, 1978). Being able to professionally gather information may be one claim to journalistic identity (Lowrey, 2006). But in a moment in which data is plentiful, it may be that shoe-leather reporting and access to sources are less important than sensemaking and providing context (Coddington, 2013). Perhaps professionalism is something to be performed rather than practiced, with reporters drawing professional boundaries in their interactions with each other, sources and how they present themselves to the public (Revers, 2014). And all of this may operate differently in sports journalism, in which recognized professionalism allows entry into closed reporting spaces and access to sources, while data is open access and requires little in the way of credentialing (Mount, 2015).

As an academic field, journalism studies' approach to boundary work has privileged the discourse of journalists in defining the field (Carlson, 2015a). Only a few studies have looked at the ways outsiders have attempted to define the profession. News aggregators, for instance, exhibit many of the characteristics of traditional newswork and even connect their jobs to established roles in journalism – the rewrite desk or even editor positions (Anderson, 2013b). As part of a larger debate within a newsroom about the place of online commenters, Robinson (2010) found no agreement among posters about how journalism should address itself to the public. Online commenters are not an occupational group, but they do engage in what Carlson (2015a) describes as “metajournalistic discourse,” the practice of shaping the meaning of the

profession through articulation of new definitions. A range of stakeholders have a say in accepting, rejecting or modifying any claims about jurisdictions, “To chart a particular phenomenon is to chart the boundaries that constitute it as well as the forces that contribute to its forging, reinforcing or challenging those boundaries” (S. C. Lewis, 2015, p. 218).

This project furthers the study of boundary work in journalism by examining how a group of workers on the periphery of the profession, in-house sports reporters, define the field. In-house reporters by and large do not accept that they have left the profession of journalism, even as they cash paychecks with a team or a league logo on them. They say they continue to engage in many of the same practices and adhere to the same ethical principles that independent journalists do, right down to performing independence as a means of establishing credibility. The transplanting of practices from independent media allows them to make a claim to journalistic status. Journalism’s borders have shifted to accommodate a variety of new actors based on medium, practices, and relationships to objectivity. Can journalism keep the marketers out, especially if they are doing what looks like journalism? This leads to the question of what journalism looks like. Is journalism a set of practices? Is journalism a normative orientation? Is it a combination of the two?

Boundary work and sports journalism

The cynic might also ask, in modeling themselves after sports writers, are in-house reporters actually adopting the techniques of journalism at all? Sports journalism has been a site of intense boundary work within the profession, both by those who cover sports and by those who share news organizations with them. All three of Gieryn’s strains – expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy have been apparent. Some have engaged in the boundary work of expulsion, as journalists have questioned the importance of covering sports and the ethical

practices of those who do so. Hunter S. Thompson (who found his way into sportswriting eventually) may not be a representative of the journalistic establishment, but when *Rolling Stone* sent him to the 1973 Super Bowl, he dismissed what he saw in the press box as entirely unserious.

Sportswriters are a kind of rude and brainless subculture of fascist drunks whose only real function is to publicize & sell whatever the sports editor sends them out to cover. ... Which is a nice way to make a living, because it keeps a man busy and requires no thought at all. The two keys to success as a sportswriter are: 1) A blind willingness to believe anything you're told by the coaches, flacks, hustlers and other "official spokesmen" for the team-owners who provide the free booze ... and: 2) A Roget's Thesaurus, in order to avoid using the same verbs and adjectives twice in the same paragraph. (Thompson, 1973)

Thompson is using the boundary work of expulsion here, separating sports reporting from actual journalism. As Thompson understood it, sportswriters are selling rather than reporting, focused on style instead of substance and often drunk on the job rather than acting as conscientious professionals. None of journalism's core ethics are there to be found. Thompson's description may be especially poetic (and maybe Thompson lacked some standing to complain about substance use on the job), but journalists have long used sports reporting as a contrast to the serious and ethical work found elsewhere in the profession (Oates & Pauly, 2007).

Sports journalists themselves have engaged in the boundary work of expansion, describing their professional approach in ways that stress its similarity with the reporting in news departments. A generation before Thompson, New York *Herald Tribune* Sports Editor Stanley Woodward described the work his section produced as an extension of news reporting into a different context.

Coverage of sports involves all the things that come up in general newspaper work, such as law, politics, economics, domestic relations, genealogy, dramatics, police, female fashions and war. When a man goes out on a sports assignment he may become involved in any or all of these before he gets home. ... A sports story can be a weather story, as it was January 1, 1934 when most of the Los Angeles and Pasadena fire departments had to

be called out to pump a lake off the playing surface of the Rose Bowl. It can be a story of sudden death, when a horse falls at a steeple-chase jump and the jockey's skull is fractured or when a fighter is killed in the ring. It can be a legal story, as when the New York Yankees went to court seeking an order to restrain the Mexican League from stealing their players. It can be a police story, as when the cops came in to apprehend gamblers who tried to fix a football game between the Chicago Bears and New York Giants. (Woodward, 1949, p. 62)

Woodward stresses the similarities between the work of the sports page and the city room. Their work touches on many of the same themes. Independent sports journalists therefore have long sought to define journalism in a way that includes them, rejecting the idea that what they cover and how they cover it is somehow not serious and ethically informed work.

Meanwhile, sports journalists have found their jurisdiction over sports news under threat since the rise of radio. While attempting to maintain their place in journalism, they also have tried to build boundaries between themselves and other voices in the sports media system. Journalists have worked to protect their authority against broadcasters, who also provide information but they say serve more of a promotional function (Woodward, 1949). Sports journalists have also engaged in boundary work to protect their authority against people like bloggers and statistical analysts, who challenged the basis of their authority over sports news. Sports journalists constructed a version of authority based on access to players and sources, something these other groups lacked (Craggs, 2009; M. Lewis, 2003). Bloggers who lacked access to locker rooms and analysts who use data rather than quotations to justify their authority claimed to be offering a more definitive account of the sporting world. This epistemological struggle represented a credibility contest, one likely won by the outsiders, who have found their ways into the sporting establishment, including journalism.

Sports reporting's contested place in journalism

Sportswriting has been part of American media dating back to the days just after the revolution (Betts, 1953; McChesney, 1989). By the 1850s, most urban newspapers devoted regular space to sports news and notes, publishing the results of various competitions and early incarnations of the baseball box score (Betts, 1953; Schiff, 2008; Tygiel, 2000). Sports reporting therefore predates broad recognition of journalism as a distinct cultural category (Schudson, 1978). As political party support of the press receded, newspapers addressed themselves directly to urban identity as a means of building audiences; sports coverage was a ready-made tool for that (Kaniss, 1991). Many of the earliest star journalists built reputations, in part, through sports writing. Richard Harding Davis – who Schudson credits with articulating a vision of journalistic autonomy in an 1898 dispute with William Randolph Hearst – spent many Saturday afternoons during the 1890s writing about college football for Hearst's *New York Journal* (Oriard, 1993, p. 72).

Yet sports always occupied an uneasy place in American newspapers, even before there was a journalistic establishment to question it. Despite devoting major resources to intersectional horse races or boxing matches, James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* apologized for its sports coverage. Editorials said the publication would rather not devote attention to such frivolity, but it was "the theme of conversation throughout the country among all classes of men" (via Betts, 1953, p. 44). In 1858, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* devoted six columns to coverage of a prize fight, while at the same time editorializing against the depravity of boxing (Betts, 1953, p. 44). Despite the tone of these takes, Betts argues the only thing that prevented antebellum newspapers from devoting even more resources to sports coverage was the lack of a consistent athletic calendar.

Inventing a new jurisdiction

Sportswriting as a distinct newspaper specialty emerged in the 1850s. British-born writer Henry Chadwick is credited as the first newspaper sports journalist. He produced a freelance cricket column for various New York newspapers, but it was his work on baseball that helped create this new profession. By his death in 1908, Chadwick was known as the “Father of Base Ball,” by some, and the “father of the baseball writing profession” by others (Schiff, 2008, p. 156). This connection reflects the deep connections between media and sports.

As the first sportswriter, Chadwick’s career embodies some of the conflicts that continue to complicate sports journalism’s place within the profession today. Chadwick believed his job was to promote baseball, although his biographers say he did so from the perspective of someone who wanted to spread the sport’s social benefits (Schiff, 2008). During the early days of the sport, he was far from a simple observer the game. He served on the committees that formalized rules and helped bring together regional sanctioning bodies to create a more uniform national sport. This included weighing in on political battles like whether a ball caught on one bounce should be an out, which roiled the baseball establishment for a time in the 1860s (Schiff, 2008, pp. 55–58). In this way he was more like the pre-Civil War magazine editors, who considered themselves advocates for their preferred sports.

At the same, Chadwick’s newspaper work demonstrated independence. He fiercely criticized the baseball establishment for its tolerance of gambling and drunkenness, appendages to the game that he felt diminished the sport’s role in social reform. This left him periodically marginalized as those stung by his criticism sought to limit his influence (Schiff, 2008). Even in those moments, Chadwick felt baseball brought myriad benefits to communities and thought the press should be educating the public about the sport (Tygiel, 2000).

Chadwick's lasting contribution was the invention of baseball statistics, which served publicity purposes, but also reflected his own beliefs about the role of the sport in furthering social reform (Schiff, 2008; Tygiel, 2000). Chadwick's annual league guides centralized the sport's history and records, serving a role now occupied by team public relations departments. In creating statistics, Chadwick and his cohort invented a body of knowledge about the sport, a means by which spectators could understand it and even participate in it. This new form of knowledge invented a jurisdiction, the record keeper. Newspaper reporters stepped forward to fill this niche. Yet his early scorekeeping work created two systems, one for official scorers or journalists and one for fans attending games. The first sports journalist engaged in boundary work, creating practices that demarcated the professional observer from the interested amateur. Producing honest and accurate statistical accounts of games represents an initial ethical practice in sports journalism.

Writers around the country adopted both Chadwick's statistical practices and, briefly, his general approach to writing game stories (Nawrocki, 1993; Voigt, 1966, p. 94). Sportswriters used control over data as a means of claiming a role in the baseball establishment as well as building professional links with each other. In 1882, baseball reporters in Detroit banded together to close the press box to both fans and newspapers writers without defined assignments. Access to stadium work space became another means of demarcating themselves from other journalists (Voigt, 1966, p. 196). Five years later, baseball writers created the Reporters National Association, an organization whose mission was to bring statistical practices into alignment. The result was a guild system, limiting paid official scoring duties to its members. In 1908, the Base Ball Writers Association of America, which still exists today, replaced the RNA but still viewed statistical accuracy as a core mission. Whatever other privileges it sought to

secure for its members, the basis of the organization's formation was its commitment to accurate representation of the sport, much as journalism ethics would demand.

Even into the early 1900s, after narrative sportswriting had become a common part of the sports section, keeping score correctly remained a core professional skill, but also a means from separating the experts from the dilettantes. In 1909, A.R. Cratty, Pittsburgh correspondent for *Sporting Life Magazine* wrote that the influx of new writers into sports reporting meant neophytes were now providing incorrect play-by-play information to the public, conditions that made World Series reporting especially problematic.

Strikes me that the World's Series gave dozens of displays of incompetent base ball (*sic – the sport went by two words at that time*) writing. One evening an account of the game as sent in by a press association was compared, play by play, with a story of the game as written by a veteran, a man who had seen hundreds of combats. Four instances developed where the old-timer sent in the play with a different man figuring than in the press account. ... Odds that the veteran had the plays sized rightly. He knew the game, but the press association man didn't, for the latter wound up one inning with this line, "No runs, one hit, no errors" Search for that, hit brought out the fact that it was a plain "fielder's choice," so scored by every box score that came out of Detroit. (Cratty, 1909)

This is to say that even as baseball writing was increasingly full of verbal flair, managing data still went to core of what it meant to be a sports journalist (Fullerton, 1928). Cratty engages in boundary work of autonomy protection, asserting the existence of inside information and superiority of specific ways of knowing baseball. Young and untrained reporters produced journalistically faulty accounts because they lacked the knowledge of a trained professional.

Chadwick built a self-conscious professional community of likeminded writers. He understood this group of reporters as a "fraternity," and he used his stature and column space to boost the careers of those he felt met his ethical standards. He also castigated those he felt disgraced the larger group, once calling out another writer in print for engaging in extramarital affairs (Voigt, 1966, p. 92-93). Chadwick policed the boundaries of the profession he created,

and tried to hold it to specific moral standards. What Chadwick and others, like Al Spink of the *Sporting News* did was negotiate a place within the baseball establishment for writers, by advancing a claim of mutual interest (Lamb, 2012, pp. 31–32). They carved out a jurisdiction for journalists within sports, one based on capturing the truth, an ethic of journalism even before there were formal ethics codes.

Sports journalism and media ethics

The press has always made normative claims for itself, even before it had a codified professional ideology. Benjamin Harris, who in 1690 printed *Publick Occurrences*, the first American newspaper, spoke to ideals of truth and balance when he “promised to painstakingly report events, be careful in dealing with sources, print retractions if reporting mistakes were made, and take steps toward ‘Curing, or at least the charming of that Spirit of Lying, which prevails among us’” (via Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley, 2002, p. 44). The rise of professional journalism in the late 19th century was accompanied by ethical discourse as well. The first journalists spoke about the importance of truth and the role of information in a society as a means of justifying their claims to profession status (Keeler et al., 2002, p. 49). The early trade press used ethical discourse to help define the field (Cronin, 1993). The propagation of ethics codes was, in part, a response to World War I propaganda efforts. Most of the early ones were embedded in the libertarian tradition and focused on truth and independence, although others spoke to service (Siebert et al., 1956).

As journalism matured, the sporting press seemed increasingly out-of-place within the industry. The journalism of the 1920s defined itself in opposition to the publicity industry, claiming to serve as a check on propaganda (Abbott, 1988, p. 225; Schudson, 1978). Many viewed sports departments as failing to live up to these newly codified responsibilities. In the late 1920s, the American Society of Newspaper Editors sought to crack down on ethical lapses in

sports departments, which included accepting money from promoters and going to print outside of normal newsroom processes (Evensen, 1993). ASNE claimed these practices reduced the credibility of all journalism, saying that sports departments were “forcing newspapers to be ham hooks with which to get their ham” (Evensen, 1993, p. 234). Ghostwriting, a practice in which sports stars “authored” their own articles was one of the problems that led to ASNE’s founding in 1923 (Roessner, 2014, p. 158).

Publishers resisted some efforts to reign in sports departments, reflecting their own beliefs that sports coverage as it existed helped their bottom lines (Carvalho, 2004). This reflects a tension inherent in sports content, which was in the paper in order to sell the paper. Other ethics, such as independence and objectivity also find a difficult expression in sports media.

If a Chicago newspaper provided a visiting basketball team coverage as sympathetic as it provides the hometown Chicago Bulls, this would be understood as treachery, as if The Times of London had treated press releases from Hitler’s Germany with the same deference as those from 10 Downing Street. (Schudson, 2001, p. 164)

Sports reporting remains a bastion of parochial interest, which conflicts with the ethical stance of journalism more broadly.

Those writing about sports journalism sought to embed it in the profession’s ethical discourse. In describing this “specialist” role, New York *Herald Tribune* editor Stanley Walker (1934) distinguishes between what he terms the “Gee Whizz” and the “Aw Nuts” schools of sportswriting (p. 122-3). The former openly engaged in mythmaking around sports, as exemplified by Grantland Rice’s poetic ledes and references to Biblical and mythological figures that cast athletes as larger-than-life. The latter school was comprised of “debunker(s)” (p. 127), people horrified by false heroes and the commerce around sports.

Walker’s passage defines a central professional tension, but declares everyone’s work within the boundaries of the profession, even those whose excesses who felt a little embarrassing

to seasoned journalists by the 1930s. Walker called Rice's work "magnificent, and may God bless us all, pretty terrible" (Walker, 1934, p. 124). This sort of discourse defended media practice and allowed everyone writing sports at a newspaper, even those who rejected an adversarial role (Gallico, 1938; Holtzman, 1973), to claim a place within the profession. No sports journalist would define the field in a way that excluded Rice, who was college educated and brought respectability to the field (Berkow, 1986; Fountain, 1993). With Rice as a public avatar, sportswriters had a beloved figure through which to gain credibility with the public.

The boundaries enacted by sports journalists shifted with the rise of electronic media. Longtime New York *Herald Tribune* sports editor Stanley Woodward (1949) attempted to sidestep Walker's gee whiz-aw nuts dichotomy by introducing the "on-the-nose" category. He described this as a writer who, "leaves the hooray-hooray business to radio announcers and yet refuses to make a career of sneering. It employs a picturesque free-hand writing, but it won't strain a fact to make a lead stronger, nor will it employ unjustified innuendo" (p. 60). The sports journalist in this telling adheres to ethics of truth and objectivity. Sports journalists present situations accurately, rather than filtering them through a lens of awe or cynicism. Woodward says that by 1949, the Grantland Rices of the world moved from newspapers to radio and, increasingly, television; indeed, Grantland Rice himself was as much a radio star as he was a columnist in the 1940s (Fountain, 1993). Moreover, Woodward writes that at the time of his book, most of the New York newspapers had aligned their sports production process with those of the other editorial departments, eliminating some of differences across sections in the way ASNE had demanded (Evensen, 1993; Woodward, 1949). This brought sports journalism into greater ethical alignment with the field as a whole. Adhering to journalism ethics made sports reporters' professional claims stronger.

Sportswriters also entered the business with stronger levels of journalistic training. Legendary columnist Red Smith started his career as a police reporter, finding his way into sports later (Berkow, 1986). Roger Kahn's *Memories of Summer* (2004) focuses primarily on covering the Brooklyn Dodgers in the Jackie Robinson years, but also describes his years on the *Herald Tribune* desk, which he said embedded him in the profession. He says that training led him to give up being a fan and start being a journalist.

Holtzman's *No Cheering the Press Box* (1973), an oral history with some of the pioneers in sportswriting, shows this noticeable shift in professional orientations. Early sportswriters lived and traveled with the teams they covered, sharing train cars and poker games (Yardley, 1977). This created close relationships bordering on what has been called "emotional graft," as these close connections kept reporters from taking a more critical stance toward the people they covered (Towers, 1981, p. 17). In early interviews with Holtzman, some writers brag about intervening on behalf of management to convince unhappy players to sign contracts (p. 8-9), or refusing to ask Babe Ruth questions about a paternity suit in order to maintain a good relationship with him (p. 23-24). Those writers largely were outside institutional journalism by the 1970s.

Those that remained articulated strong professional principles. Shirley Povich, who spent more than 70 years at the *Washington Post* and who worked into the 1990s, describes the sense of liberation he felt when he embraced a journalistic identity. He said he came to understand that "You're doing it for a newspaper, yourself, for your pride, for your satisfaction" (p. 127-8). Jimmy Cannon of the *New York Daily News* describes the relationship between writers and players as "cop-and-crook" (p. 277). In this, he articulates idealized versions of adversarial

journalism. This push to more fully align with journalistic ethics is itself an act of boundary work, a way of claiming full memberships in the professional community of journalism.

Protecting their own turf

Sports journalists have faced significant threats to their jurisdictions before the rise of in-house media, and have acted to preserve their own authority. From the mid-1910s through about 1960, sports reporters resisted the practice of ghostwriting, in which players “produced” bylined content for various outlets and syndicates (Roessner, 2014). Journalists described this practice as “the player-writer evil,” underscoring the threat they felt it posed to their profession (p. 104). Yet the nature of that threat was never universally agreed upon. The American Society of Newspaper Editors felt that printing anything not produced by journalists damaged the reputation of news organizations. Others thought ghostwriting itself was the problem, and that if players actually authored the articles that appeared under their names, it would be acceptable. Still others felt that baseball players were actually less knowledgeable about the sport than expert baseball writers employed by newspapers, meaning ghostwritten articles failed to serve readers (p. 157).

Radio and television challenged to journalists’ control over sports information. Fans who can listen to or watch games no longer exclusively rely on reporters to know what happened. Some journalistic practices changed to address this. Game stories with quotes rather than descriptions of game action became the norm across the industry, not just province of evening papers. Access to athletes immediately after the game became a form of professional differentiation. Dick Young of the *New York Daily News*, one of the towering figures in the field, was credited with bringing this to morning papers (Belth, 2013; Briley, 2006). Increasingly, electronic media have infiltrated reporting spaces as well. Press conferences after important games are now broadcast live on various outlets, as are many of the postgame locker room

interviews. Instead of having to wait for the next day's newspapers, player and coach analysis of a game is available immediately.

Another response was to expel the “gee whizz” reporters, attempting to reposition them as part of the broadcast apparatus around sports rather than the journalistic one (Woodward, 1949). Yet broadcasters do not see themselves as completely separate from journalists, with many saying they attempt to maintain a journalistic tone so they will be taken seriously (Fortunato, 2001, p. 121). Some game broadcasters have shown a willingness to engage with larger issues through the lens of sports. NBC's Bob Costas has used game broadcasts to tie sporting events to issues like gun control and racism (Gleeson, 2012; Kogod, 2013; Yoder, 2012). Moreover, observers of electronic media often apply journalistic standards to broadcasts, criticizing them for their failing to provide fully nuanced accounts of sports (Deitsch, 2012, 2015). This reflects a shared idea by some broadcasters and others in the media that sports content should maintain a “problem orientation” (Rowe, 2007). This is far from a universal belief, especially in broadcast sports (Hartmann, 2007), which reflects the indeterminate status of this content. Do journalism ethics require the insertion of social issues into sports coverage, or would that reflect editorializing?

Outsiders also have challenged the expertise of sportswriters, often through the use of data. In the late 1970s Bill James, who worked as a night watchman in a food processing plant at the time, began self-publishing the *Baseball Abstract*, a series of books that tested the received baseball wisdom (Gray, 2006; M. Lewis, 2003). He found most of it lacking. Michael Lewis' popular work *Moneyball* depicts baseball's media establishment as resistant to James' ideas, ridiculing and rejecting them in part because they undermined their authority (p. 89). If success and failure could be explained numerically, journalists' special access to teams and players

would lose value. Ultimately, statistics found their way into mainstream sports commentary, and have especially been present in online sports reporting. Journalists now bring statistical insights to their work, although selectively, and usually married with the inside access that has helped sports journalists justify their professional claims.

Sports journalists also have engaged in boundary work around digital media. This includes both competing with sports blogs – which often lack the same access to institutional sources – and social media, a method by which voices ranging from players to fans can communicate directly with audiences. Both represent challenges to the jurisdiction of sports journalists at legacy outlets, as new actors challenge professionals' place as intermediaries between participants in athletic competitions and the public. Reporters who have found their ways to online outlets have defended their own place in the profession. Journalists who left newspapers for independent online outlets generally are satisfied with what they are able to do (Kian & Zimmerman, 2012). Many trust online outlets connected to larger sites, but do not view those working at blogs as engaging in journalism, and in many cases express contempt for blogs' role in the sports media system (Kian & Murray, 2014). Online sites often take on stories that traditional media will not touch, in the process often calling attention to ways the relationships enabled by journalistic status can lead to ethically problematic work (Burroughs & Vogan, 2015). That said, legacy sports media has been seen to provide a greater level of context into stories than online sites (Hardin & Ash, 2011; Whiteside, Yu, & Hardin, 2012).

Through this all, ethics remain a way journalists try to distinguish themselves in an increasingly crowded media sphere. Sports journalists want to be seen as full participants in their professional community (Garrison & Salwen, 1994; Salwen & Garrison, 1998). Efforts at the boundary work of expansion include the promulgation of ethics codes, although their rigor has

been questioned (“APSE Ethics Guidelines,” n.d.; Wulfemeyer, 1985). At the same time, sports editors have said they find local boosterism and accepting gifts from local teams acceptable practices (Hardin, 2005). Newspaper sports coverage is almost entirely geared around events rather than investigations or discussions of social issues (Rosenstiel, Mitchell, Chinni, & Vaina, 2005; Rowe, 2007). Sports journalists have come to embrace a separate set of ethical norms on issues like gambling (Hardin, Zhong, & Whiteside, 2009). Against those ethical struggles, interactive media have created a new set of concerns. Social media has become an increasingly important job requirement and reporting tool for sports journalists, but the ethics of responsible use are a means of professional self-definition (Reed, 2011; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). Accounts of ethics are therefore fully entwined with professional self-definition, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Boundary work and the in-house outlet

The changing media technology that made the in-house sports outlet a possibility also destabilized occupational and institutional categories within this system. The arrangements that once placed sports journalists as central nodes connecting institutions and audiences no longer exist by themselves. Now a range of actors sit in that space, sharing messages about sports that affect our understanding of an important cultural institution. Similar shifts have happened in politics, technology and entertainment news. In sports, the institutionalization of in-house production has proceeded quickly. The building of media companies and the hiring of permanent employees suggests an organizational commitment to media production that will further reshape communication networks.

The sports journalist is a recognized cultural category, one connected to the journalism profession but never quite fully accepted there. Ethical practices that characterize other areas of journalism have found inconsistent application within sports coverage. The emergence of the in-

house reporter reflects some of the contradictions inherent in the role of sports journalist. Sports media has been called the “world’s best advertising agency” (Schultz-Jorgenson, 2005), and no doubt much of a sports journalist’s daily work serves a publicity function for the people she covers. Game stories, feature stories, injury updates, even critical columns help sports leagues and teams gain attention and relate to fans. Very little of this work necessarily requires a journalist to serve as an intermediary.

In-house reporters seek to establish a jurisdiction over sports information; they are engaged in the boundary work of expansion. This takes of the form of appropriating the genre conventions and professional ideology of independent journalists. Independent sports reporters have focused their professional claims on being inside the locker room and having access to sources. In-house reporters’ access, in many cases, may go beyond that of their independent counterparts. As we will see in the coming chapters both define themselves professionally in similar terms, including adherence to ethical principles. This boundary work addresses itself to the rest of the sports media system and the public.

The professional associations of sports journalists take differing approaches to these outlets. The Base Ball Writers Association of America forbade mlb.com writers from joining for 15 years before finally letting them join in December 2015 (Coleman, 2015). In-house writers still are ineligible for membership in the Pro Hockey Writers Association of America (Personal Communication, 2015) and the Pro Football Writers Association (Personal Communication, 2015). The Pro Basketball Writers Association of America does not allow in-house writers to join, but members who go to work for teams may be grandfathered in assuming their work continues to meet ill-defined standards. Those who work for nba.com are allowed to join, despite

potential conflicts, as they are officially employees of Turner Sports rather than the league itself (Personal Communication, 2013, 2015).

Even discourse about these sites is conflicted. If an in-house network seeks to be a news source, what expectations should audiences have for it? In 2012, when Kansas City Chiefs player Jovan Belcher died by suicide at the team's practice facility after murdering his girlfriend, the NFL Network did not cut into programming to report the news (Deitsch, 2012). Earlier that year, the Big Ten Network did not air the press conference Penn State held after it released the report it commissioned about the university's actions related to the Jerry Sandusky child abuse scandal (Hoge, 2012). Not speaking to these incidents makes sense for a marketing organ but not for a journalistic one. Yet the NFL Network also has hired reporters to cover head injuries (Deitsch, 2013), which some believe is the most pressing threat to the future existence of the sport. There have been instances where teams have complained about mlb.com's coverage of the league, such as in 2004 when San Francisco Giants General Manager Brian Sabean describe the site's approach to Barry Bonds as similar to the "National Enquirer" (McCauley, 2005). The credibility contest generated by in-house reporting remains unresolved. The data presented in the next four chapters will attempt to lay out the terms of that contest.

Carlson (2015b) defines the question of "what is a journalist" as an "example of expulsion in journalistic boundary work" (p. 10). In that instance, journalists are the ones drawing lines around their profession to keep out undesired interlopers. But journalists do not get to make this determination on their own. This project takes up this question as a matter of expansion, emphasizing the perspectives of those a group challenging for a place within the field of sports journalism. One of Gieryn's original case studies of boundary work was an unsuccessful attempt by phrenologists in 1830s to gain recognition as scientists. In-house

reporters may be analogous to those phrenologists. The strength of the establishment to keep them out, however, is an open question.

Chapter 3: Strangers in a strange land: In-house reporters and the redrawing of the media map

Chapter 1 argued that existing models of the sports media system describe organizational categories, occupational ideologies and message flows from an era of one-way communication. Lowered barriers to entry into media production and interactive technologies have given rise to a range of new voices in sports media (and beyond). Their jurisdiction under threat, sports journalists no longer act as exclusive information conduits. New media voices have layered in atop the old ones. Pre-digital information flows still play a significant role, but a lack of exclusivity changes their cultural resonance. As discussed in Chapter 2, challenges to professional status have made it urgent for journalists to find new ways to define their profession in an era of increasing competition. In-house sports journalists engage in the boundary work of expansion; they want to establish themselves as an accepted source of information about the teams and leagues they work for and cover. They do this by laying claim to sports journalists' occupational ideologies. The goal is not to expel independent reporters, but to join them. This requires in-house reporters to rearticulate core journalistic concepts in ways that include them.

Gieryn (1999) likens boundary work to cultural cartography. Professions articulate borders between themselves and others and in doing so, they map out who holds authority over what domains. This chapter describes how in-house reporters place the "You are here" marker on their map of cultural authority, and how they define their place in a system that includes a range of other professional groups. I argue here that those who have entered in-house reporting view themselves very much as working in journalism's territory. Those who have left independent news see their in-house roles as an extension of their previous careers; if they have emigrated out of journalistic lands they still maintain their former citizenship.

In-house writers identify most closely with newspaper beat reporters, a journalistic job category charged with reporting facts rather than producing opinion content. They generally describe collegial but competitive relationships with independent reporters. They articulate some purposeful alienation from the team structures they work within, allowing them to claim what they believe is a measure of autonomy in their work lives. They also assert a strict boundary between themselves and team public relations departments. In short, one of the ways they engage in the boundary work of expansion is to claim they occupy the same place in the sports media system as independent journalists. The distinctions they work hard to enforce are rooted in the language of media ethics and idealized conceptions of the sports journalist. Arguing for a similar place within the network, they believe, gives them standing to rearticulate the ethical norms of the profession as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5. Yet their maps of cultural authority are the pre-digital ones, meaning they assert professional and team control over information in ways that the broader access to communication tools has challenged.

[Just a new home for journalism](#)

The in-house reporters interviewed for this project traveled variable routes to team- or league-based outlets. Yet few took these roles out of a desire to work in the sports industry; many would object to that characterization. In-house reporters understand their positions as more like news work than promotional work. Those coming from independent media generally view their new roles as an extension of what they were doing before, just in an economically healthy industry. Some were excited about the possibilities and flexibilities working online would afford. Many joined in-house media after taking buyouts from news organizations, to avoid being laid off or after making career choices influenced heavily by the industry's challenges. The younger reporters in this sample viewed in-house reporting as a means of establishing themselves as media producers in a moment when jobs are scarce. They articulated a view of their work that

collapsed distinctions between in-house reporting and journalism, and made weaker claims to that professional status.

Early adopters

Those who entered in-house reporting in the early years said they had no clue what they were getting into. One of the first reporters who moved to a team-based site had been covering that team for a local newspaper periodically for a decade. He said he had developed good, but adversarial, relationships within the organization including with the team's owner. It was the owner who approached him about coming over the team website.

He approached me ... and said they were putting up the website and he wanted me to think about working for them. I said, "(Team owner), I don't know much about the Internet. My recommendation to you would be to hire a young guy right out of college who knows something about computers." "No," he said. "I want a guy that readers know, readers trust and I want you to cover the team like you're the (newspaper), but I want you to do it for us. People will know that this guy giving me information knows what he's talking about." ... That convinced me. ... Newsprint is in my blood. I've been doing it since I'm 16, 17 years old, it was tough to leave the newspaper, but at the start of the 21st century, it was also an exciting situation. ... He's been the best boss I ever had. He would have been a great city editor. Want to cover a league meeting? Cover a league meeting. Want to cover (a league event)? Cover the (league event). I didn't sign a contract or anything, I shook his hand. ... He certainly had a bead on (the rise of the Internet) more than I did.

The opportunity to work in a new medium was part of the appeal, but he was not looking to leave journalism. In fact, the job was pitched to him as covering the team like he was the newspaper, an extension of journalism. This writer said later in the interview that he viewed his work as journalism, achieving the goal set forth by the team's owner. The language he used to praise his boss invoked a news structure, he cast him as a city editor who encouraged him to do ambitious reporting. This is the boundary work of expansion; he views his in-house outlet as just another spot in which to practice journalism and even views his boss in those terms.

Mlb.com came online around the same time. Early hires at the site reported being unclear on what online baseball reporting would look like. "To be perfectly honest, when I was hired, I

didn't think it would last," one writer said. "I didn't understand the impact the internet would have on things." In the early days, independent beat writers viewed mlb.com as something of a punchline rather than a serious competitor. As one writer put it:

At first, they weren't hiring writers among newspaper people. They were hiring PR people and people who barely knew how to put sentences together. So we thought mlb.com was a frickin' joke. Slowly, but surely, not to toot my own horn, I was one of the first legitimate guys they hired in (year). Slowly, but surely they gained legitimacy by hiring people such as myself.

In this telling, mlb.com developed a positive reputation among baseball writers by fully embracing journalism. The writers who took positions at mlb.com said in their interviews that they understand themselves as operating on an equal footing as newspaper beat writers. Both of these early hires said adjusting to online deadlines and new audiences was the biggest challenge, not adapting their work practices or skeptical stance toward the team. Those remained constant. The site also built a management structure that looked like a newspaper, using disclaimers on every story to assert its independence. This helped many of the early arrivals view themselves as not really having left journalism.

Mlb.com's reporters believe the boundary work accomplished by the site's early reporters did succeed in carving out a jurisdiction for the site. Those who joined mlb.com later than the two reporters interviewed above said perceptions of the site improved gradually, thanks to the credibility and authority early writers claimed and won.

I think it was looked at as they're going to be cheerleaders and a mouthpiece for the organization. And sometimes you see stories that you wouldn't find in a newspaper or elsewhere. But I think over time, as newspaper reporters have worked alongside the beat reporters for mlb.com, they see that they're doing, if not 100 percent the same stuff, than 90 or 95 percent of the same stuff. And that, I think, increases the legitimacy of the work that we're doing. I think there's a lot more respect now, certainly there was when I got there, and way more respect than when it first started. ... You'll see quote-unquote legitimate journalists retweet our work, cite our work, that type of thing, as opposed to just saying these guys are jokes that just rah-rah-rah go team go.

Over time, independent journalists accepted mlb.com reporters as colleagues. Retweeting their work may not be an official endorsement, but it does provide a sense of outside validation. This is an important aspect of boundary work, given that a group's claims to jurisdiction must be accepted by other actors. Independent beat writers have done that with mlb.com, at least to an extent. In some cases, independent news agencies have hired reporters away from mlb.com to cover teams when they have had beat writer openings, suggesting that they view this work as roughly comparable to newspaper beat writing.

These early adopters continue to define themselves as journalists even after having worked in-house for many years. They say they still adhere to the values of the profession and produce independent work, no matter who their bosses are. This connects to a core tenet of professionalism, the insulation of individuals from structural pressures. A reporter cannot necessarily control who her bosses are, but she can use the occupational and ethical norms of journalism to insulate her work and reputation. Yet the boundary work they engage in also reflects on the entity hosting the site. If journalists work for news organizations, then a reporter for an in-house site viewed as a journalist creates a level of stature for his organization. Teams and leagues rely on transmitting information to the public, which is the reason they have invested in reporting. In-house reporters may not view themselves as engaging actively in promotion, but their work also has that benefit (this is true of independent reporters as well, which is why teams actively solicit media coverage). In this case, though, in-house reporters' work being understood as journalism could make the team's website itself a more credible outlet for a range of messages that may go beyond news.

[Economic refugees](#)

In-house outlets also offered landing spots to reporters who had been forced out of traditional media due to economic issues. One writer described taking a buyout after his

newspaper was sold and new management started making changes he viewed as damaging to the institution.

I was not ready to retire, didn't intend to retire, but conditions had gotten so bad. ... I loved my career at the (newspaper), it was the best place I'd ever worked, but (new ownership) destroyed it and just made working conditions so terrible. And then, the industry cratered. They started to push out as many senior people as they could. So I was glad to join that group at the time, given what was going on. It was industry wide, it was a little more pronounced at the (newspaper). So then, having achieved relatively well in the business, I felt confident I'd be able to get a job somewhere else. I didn't have to be making as much, just to work. You do journalism for the work, you don't do it for the money. I made more money, and it was only for a few years, but I was an accountant, I took a huge pay cut, 50 percent probably, to get a reporting job. It wasn't about money. I'd written books, and had success, but I couldn't find any job.

His buyout coincided with a financial crisis and he could not find a staff position, which is what he was looking for.

You could freelance for a couple hundred dollars a story, chasing it around. I like working for somebody. I'm not that entrepreneurial. I like being part of something and I couldn't really find anything with traditional newspapers, magazines, really anything. ... I started thinking about a team website. I don't know exactly why I thought about those. Partially, an owner I knew owned (a team) I was talking to him because I'm friends with him. When I had nothing, I said what if I did some work for your website? We started talking about that, and I got to thinking about it, well, if I'm going to do that kind of thing, it should be in (the city where he had worked) where I'm known and worked for (many) years and written books and things like that. So with the decline in journalism and at the (newspaper), they didn't replace my job, so they didn't have an (league beat) writer anymore after I left, still don't. So I presented that notion to the (hometown team). What if for the benefit of your fans, you hire me? I'm known in (the city) and I cover the team. You enhance your website, you provide journalism on your site. ... Why not go in competition with the newspaper? The newspapers are cutting down dramatically and covering the team and certainly the league not as much, why don't you try to bring eyes to your website. So I made a proposal to them. (The head of marketing) responded right away and said, yes let's try it for a year. When I was working with newspapers, not only would I have been appalled at the notion of this, I would have never thought I would have been in a position to do something like that, or I would want to consider it. I'm doing it now and it's the best journalism job I've had, the most enjoyment I've had doing it.

There is no doubt from this quote that the writer believes he is still working in journalism.

Moving to a team site was about continuing his career, not trying something new professionally.

In fact, he sought to recreate his newspaper position with the team, a job that is vanishing in response to cutbacks. At the same time, he says the ownership of the site has no bearing on his definition of journalism. The boundary work of expansion is about continuing the practices of a healthy news industry wherever possible. In fact, the team site offers him access to a jurisdiction that is unoccupied in the city's media, but more in line with independent online sports outlets, where national coverage is a good way to attract page views.

Another writer told a similar story. He took a buyout from his newspaper before he was ready to retire. A team he had covered during his newspaper days reached out to him.

I live in the neighborhood, and after I took the buyout they asked if I wanted to do some stuff for them. It sounded like fun. ... I didn't take the buyout because I didn't enjoy writing anymore. I wasn't interested in blogging or tweeting or answering fan questions. I'm old-fashioned and like writing long stories. But I always say I never worked a day in my life. I worked hard, but I enjoyed what I did. I still enjoy writing.

His role within this athletic department sees him producing a range of content for both the website and branded publications like game programs. He views his online reporting work, however, as a direct extension of his newspaper career. At the same time, he has enough control over his content that he can reject doing things outside his comfort area. His view of journalism has not changed and in-house reporting actually gives him greater control over his work life, which is what professional ideology is meant to accomplish.

These two writers are recreating what they view as classic sports journalism, which is vanishing in the face of economic retrenchment. The former is providing big-picture coverage that independent outlets no longer can afford to produce. The latter is producing work without have to adapt his work routines to the two-way technologies that now influence the practice of journalism. They locate their professional identities on the map of the sports media system in exactly the same place they did previously. Yet their statements also suggest the boundary work

of expulsion as well. They view in-house sports reporting as a throwback to sports journalism's good old days, and in opposition to the incomplete reports independent outlets are now providing. In-house work may be better serving the readers. Other writers discussed this as well. One viewed mlb.com as a place where he had the space to fully cover at team, unlike at the newspaper job he left before he could be laid off, "I am very lucky to be doing what I'm doing," he said. "To me there aren't a lot of great alternatives."

Another reporter never took a buyout, but said he believed he would have been the first one offered severance when the next round started. He saw the writing on the wall, "I was tired of working there," he said. "I had one of the highest salaries. After (nearly four decades), I wanted to leave on my own terms. The door was open and I stepped through it." Moving over to a school's athletic department gave him the opportunity to keep working and embrace a new set of challenges. "(I) have no interest in retiring," this writer said. "I am so happy. I would have made this move 10 years ago. Don't get me wrong. I miss newspapers. But we became dinosaurs. The newspapers were too full of their own bluster."

For this group of senior writers, in-house media offered them an opportunity to exert control over the end of their careers. They viewed these outlets as a response to the economic implosion of the news industry, which changed priorities at many independent outlets. Challenges were coming from within the industry itself. Three of the four writers quoted here view their work entirely as a continuation of their independent reporting, while the fourth views his in-house role as more of a hybrid. Yet in their in-house reporting, they say they have brought their previous work routines to their current roles. They recognize no significant boundaries between in-house and independent reporting because they say their work has stayed the same. As the second writer put it, "I worked too long and too hard in this business to become just a

mouthpiece. And I won't be just a mouthpiece." Once again, these writers articulate the belief that they remain journalists despite their employment arrangements, exercising what Gieryn calls the boundary work of expansion.

Some mid-career reporters found refuge from stormy economic conditions at in-house media. One interviewee landed at a team site after his employer discontinued coverage of the sport he reported on. A former news-side reporter, this writer had started blogging about the team on the side, and had been hired by a media company after that blog had built a readership. When the media outlet dropped his blog, the team invited him to continue it on the team website. In this case the team acted to maintain a voice devoted to disseminating information in the face of media cutbacks. Moving into the team role, he felt his coverage also had not changed, "I think I'm still out there doing what news guys do. I'm out there looking for information," he said. In doing so, he is engaging in journalism despite working as an in-house reporter.

This writer had found his way to sports reporting through a non-traditional path, blogging, but still maintained the journalistic identity he imported from his news work. His approach to coverage has remained the same, and this, likely, was what the team wanted. Team sites are still a new outlet for information, which means hiring writers with established reputations gives them credibility with fan communities. His own career path does represent some of the permeability of journalism as profession. He moved into his role through blogging, which as a practice, has been subject to the boundary work of expulsion by sports journalists. Given his access to the team, the blogging role likely would be less of an issue in terms of professional self-identification. The in-house role allows him to continue engaging in the boundary work of expansion, although his pre-existing reputation remains a tool for doing that work.

Many mid-career writers said the deteriorating state of the news industry contributed to them moving in-house. But this desire for stability did not equal a desire to leave journalism. As one mlb.com writer described it:

It was a brighter future really. The company is doing incredibly well, newspapers are not ... They're going in a different direction. There's layoffs and pay cuts and benefits are being reduced and there are unpaid furloughs and circulation's dropping and they're way behind technology-wise in terms of what they do on the web. I think mlb.com is probably the best of the four pro sites. They're really super cutting edge. To me that was attractive. And while certainly not exactly the same as working for a newspaper, it's still pretty close. I still get to report and I get to write and that's what I love to do. That kind of made it a fairly easy decision, I should say an easier to decision to make that jump from newspapers to a league website.

The opportunity to do what he felt would be rigorous work in a more stable environment drove him toward mlb.com. The trade-off did not include leaving journalism; in his account, he is doing something very close to newspaper work. This is the boundary work of expansion in that this writer argues that the substantial similarities between the two roles allow them to be understood as largely interchangeable.

The economic condition of newspapers was invoked by writers at team-based sites as well.

The (team) reached out to me a month before last season started. And I never really thought I'd leave the (newspaper). I loved it. I felt like I was a perfect fit for that newspaper. Quite frankly, the offer was fantastic and I recognized that maybe it was time for a new challenge. But a great motivator was just the future of print journalism is so uncertain. I've got a son, you think about, is he going to be a Badger one day, or god forbid a Buckeye? How am I going to make that happen for him? So it just came together at a perfect time.

These new challenges exist in growing industries, not contracting ones like print journalism. But again, he did not view himself as leaving journalism as much as moving into better working conditions.

Another writer said he felt an in-house role offered a unique access with which to do journalism, while also giving him more personal stability.

One was the access that I'd get being in this role. I'm here, I'm entrenched in the building. And so I thought it provided terrific access to the team, and to some content that I would not have been able to get with the (newspaper). And two, financially and the way newspapers are going right now ... I didn't know where the (newspaper) was going to be in 10 years.

In this case stability dovetailed with what this writer felt was the opportunity to do unique work covering the team. His desire to do what he felt would be better journalism in an environment where he would better compensated made the choice relatively easy.

Others coupled that instability with the opportunity to create something new in an online format. One writer said his time as a union leader at his newspaper alerted him acutely to the troubles facing the industry. He had covered a local team for nearly a decade, but could see "the writing on the wall for traditional media, it was plummeting quickly, and I started looking for a way out." But that was only part of his thinking. He also said he was at a time in his life in which he wanted to build a position of his own rather than simply be an employee. He pitched the idea to the team, making the case that he would be something unique,

I came up with the genesis of the position, which was to be more in touch with the fans by being like a member of the media, but not a member of the media. I spent 2 ½ hours pitching this idea to the marketing department. In April, the director said it was something they might want to do, and in July it came through. I had an inside track being a beat reporter.

Much of his work still looks like day-to-day beat reporting, he said. He views that part of his work as journalism, although he said he had embraced his hybrid role as well.

A writer for a college athletic department also said the opportunity to create a position was part of the appeal of going into team media. This writer worked for a wire service, which wanted to move his position to a different city. Rather than chase the job, he helped craft the new

role at a local university, “The athletic director (at the school) had thought for years about bringing in a writer to tell the stories from the department’s point-of-view,” he said. “We created the position. From a journalistic perspective it was a step back.” The writer still views his job in the context of prestige within sports journalism, which is how he defined the work he produced. In-house writers insist they continue to operate in the same ways as independent reporters. They engage in boundary work by refusing to accept that any significant differentiation exists.

Wiik (2015) argues that journalism as a professional identity is broadly shared among practitioners, but that individual journalists often find themselves negotiating increasingly divergent conditions at media outlets. In-house reporters may view themselves in this light. They are navigating a new set of occupational challenges in a field full of them. They believe themselves to be journalists, which structures how they how approach their jobs and present themselves to the public. In-house reporting may violate some professional tenets, but people all over the profession are making compromises without exiling themselves from the profession. Understanding themselves as journalists allows them to engage in various types of boundary work in good faith because they believe they speak as members-in-good standing of the profession.

Young reporters getting in the door

The question of professional identity may be more complex for those who never worked as journalists prior to taking in-house reporting jobs. Young reporters looking for opportunities in sports media described in-house sites as a way to do their preferred jobs without following journalism’s traditional career paths. These writers did not come into their jobs with a preexisting journalistic identity as much as a desire to possibly move into those sorts of roles later. These reporters tended to collapse the distinctions between in-house and independent reporting, viewing them as more similar than different.

The decision to work for a team was not exactly an easy one, said one in-house reporter, who came to his job via online sports reporting. When offered the position he weighed what it would mean for his career.

You don't really know what you're getting into, especially if you've never done it before. ... There's no model that anybody really seems to follow that's consistent from one sport or one league or one team. But in the interview process and me researching the job, I learned enough to ease my concerns. I was pretty confident that this would be a pretty independent job even though I am on the (team's) payroll, obviously. Like I said, I had my share of concerns, but it was something that the pros outweighed the cons.

With fewer independent beat reporting positions available, aspiring sports writers feel they can worry less about distinctions between newspapers and other outlets. Instead, they focus on the type of work they are able to do. To another young writer, in-house media seemed like a natural progression from the online sports internships he had been doing in college. Team media required many of the same skills and made sense in the context of his previous experience. Placing in-house reporting on the same continuum as online aggregation is a less strong case for engaging in journalism. But it does place the work in the context of news-like categories, which represent career paths in a shifting media system.

That said, no one interviewed believed working for a team foreclosed opportunities to work at newspapers later. As one team-based writer put it:

I was a sportswriter looking for any job I could get writing about sports. That was what I wanted to do, what I felt I was best at, what I was most qualified to do. So my search was pretty much wide open to anything in that realm. I stumbled on team media and just had a lot of opportunities. I'd been through the search and found some different websites that had good job listings, heard from other people who had experience in the job search themselves where to work. I came across (a team) opening, they take two interns for their website every year, been doing it for five, six, seven years now. It was pretty well known. I heard about it and just applied online, saw the application details online and it all kind of just happened from there.

He moved from that team to a different one, a progression that suggests experience at one team translates to experience at another. Another writer described a similar experience, moving between sports.

(The team) came under new ownership at that time and really were trying to ramp up what they were doing digitally. ... I applied for that. It worked out perfectly, right when the (one team's seasonal) job was ending I got a call and was offered the (current team) job. I've been there now a little over three years.

In-house reporting is developing its own shared world of work, the same thing that makes training at one newspaper applicable to another. This is another way in which in-house media can be constructed to be similar to independent journalism, expanding the similarities between the two further.

For young reporters, embracing the technological shifts that have enabled new voices into sports media helped them get their jobs. One writer said his versatility and familiarity with social media made him an attractive fit to the team that hired him. As his role developed, boundaries appeared within the organization and he started to do more editorial work and less "content marketing" such as managing the team's social media. Another said the openness of the technological environment made it easier for him to write his own job description. Teams did not know what they were looking for, but he could explain it to them.

I thought if you could come up with something they don't already have, why don't you get a job that you create? I can write 15 different ways, I can call up other journalists and essentially do my own radio show and I can do video. It seemed to me that all of these things clicked in my mind as I was working with the (team he interned with). I pulled it into a plan and sent it out.

The plan caught the attention of one team, where he worked for multiple years before being hired by another club.

Overall, this group expressed a weaker journalistic identity than those with more newsroom experience. The need to be seen as a credible source mattered, but they also viewed

the field as more open. The writers in this group identified less as journalists, but also viewed distinctions between in-house and independent reporting as not particularly important. Older writers engaged in the boundary work of expansion, stretching the definition of journalism to fit their own work. Young writers could be seen as engaging in the boundary work of expulsion, redefining their own positions as similar to independent sports reporting, but then classifying neither of them as journalism. That said, they did view themselves more as media producers than traditional strategic communicators. Some elements of wanting to be seen as outside public relations were present. At the same time, in-house reporting seems to be developing its own career training paths, suggesting that younger writers may lack the professional orientation those who move from newspapers too. They may be less likely to view in-house work in the context of selling out. Journalism may feel less urgent to a non-journalist. That also means they may be less likely to engage with journalism's normative orientation responsibilities.

Fitting into the media system

Most in-house reporters interviewed saw their jobs as an extension of their journalism careers, or else similar enough to independent reporting that the distinctions do not matter. The remainder of this chapter will examine how in-house reporters describe their relationships with other professional groups within the sports media system. Boundary work has a performative dimension (Revers, 2014). Members of a profession define their boundaries in part through their interactions with others. Examining the ways in-house writers understand their interactions with others in sports media, helps define the map of cultural authority they are seeking to draw.

In-house reporters identify most closely with newspaper beat reporters, the journalists assigned to track a team's daily comings and goings. This identification is based on shared practices, but also a commitment to news rather than opinion. In-house reporters say they are focused on spreading information rather than shaping perceptions. This aligns with classic

formulations of journalism, which stress facts, but also allows them to avoid claims they are spinning information to the team's benefit. Those distinctions are at the core of the boundary work in-house reporters engage in. Being a beat writer also suggests a competitive relationship with the reporters who cover the team on the regular basis. Yet the back-and-forth between in-house and independent reporters is limited. In-house writers seek to craft work routines in ways that help them appear autonomous from the sporting organizations they work for. This includes the construction of a boundary between in-house writers and the public relations staff, which both sides use to stabilize work relationships.

Just another beat writer

When asked to describe their own roles, virtually all the in-house reporters interviewed pointed to the newspaper beat writer as the closest comparison. Differences in tone may be noticeable, but on a day-to-day basis in-house reporters say they are doing what their independent counterparts are.

I think it's exactly like a newspaper beat guy really. ... For the most part, I do what a newspaper reporter does. We all have our sources, our stats. We all have our go-to guys to talk to. We're all trying to get the best story out there, the best narratives. I would say, daily, I am a beat guy since that's how I came into the job. That's what I am. Like I said, I'm probably a dinosaur, but that's the only way I know how to do the job.

In this case the commitment to the old ways is intended as a way of reinforcing a connection to traditional journalism. In a role that exists due to new technologies and practices, downplaying breaks with the past aligns a reporter with traditional practices. This is the boundary work of expansion, redefining the jurisdiction of news in a way that includes in-house reporting.

At mlb.com, writers take a similar view, describing their work practices as identical to independent beat reporters, right down to working for a different company. Mlb.com team sites are operated by subsidiary of the league rather than the teams themselves. "It's the same as the regular beat writer's job," one mlb.com writer said. "I don't know what the perception is by

other people reading. There's not a whole lot of difference as far as I can tell. The main job is the same." Another writer described the facts-first style as very close to wire service reporting. "To me, the way I look at reporting on the (team) for mlb.com, it's the same as if I was writing a story for the Associated Press or the United Press International," a writer said. "It would be the same as if I were writing a wire service story." This includes not using a lot of opinion in the stories.

Even those who did not express a strong attachment to a journalistic identity saw themselves as working in a beat writer capacity. One writer, who described himself as engaged in content marketing observed, "A lot of what I do overlaps with what our beat writers do, just in terms of covering the stories of the day or building relationships." Another writer who described himself as engaged in marketing echoed that description, "During the season, I essentially function as beat writer for the team web site. I go to all the games. I write previews, recaps, different features throughout the season. ... I'm basically a regular member of the (media)."

Of the 24 people interviewed, only three did not identify as a beat writer, although they did point to other newspaper roles as a closest analogue. One called himself more of a feature writer, producing articles to help build connections between fans and the team. This matched his role covering the same team for a local newspaper prior to moving over to the team site. Another writer described himself as a national beat writer, a newspaper role that has vanished as independent outlets have cut back on coverage. A third writer described his role as more expansive than anything that could be contained in newspapers, in essence, a beat-writer-plus, although beat writing remained a large part of the job. "I'm writing stories the way I was when I was a beat reporter," that interviewee said. "I go to practice, talk to the players, do interviews and write for the website, my blog, or both. That's like doing regular beat reporting. But that's really

the only similarity. Everything else is different.”

A fourth writer, who did describe himself as a beat writer, folded some opinion work into his duties. He produced a humorous column meant to discuss bad news in sometimes ridiculous ways, which allowed him to take up negative stories in ways acceptable to his bosses.

It’s always positive, or its always over-the-top positive then they can’t really mess with you too much because you’re like, well, I’m spinning it positively. That was kind of how it came up, let’s come up with something they can’t touch, and you can even get a little negative stuff in there if you spin it right, you can still get it by. It kind of came about like that. A buddy of mine who I do a lot of writing with ... we said, let’s come up with something that is somewhat untouchable, and that’s how we did it. It took on a life of its own and has a cult following all that stuff. So it’s fun. It’s my outlet.

The column may poke fun at the expectations readers might have for an in-house reporter. In a sense it attempts to disarm criticism of the team site while also sending up the idea that his job is to protect the team. Yet the beat writer is this writer’s official title and remains the primary focus of his role.

The beat writer is the down-the-middle reporter of sports journalism, the person charged with developing sources and finding new information. Claiming this as the closest analogue allows in-house reporters to make a claim for their own professional identity on purely journalistic grounds. For writers trying to establish themselves as honest sources of information, mimicking the beat writer helps establish that. In doing so, they position information as neutral and objective, outside the realm of spin and public relations. How can something like, “Coach Jones said Williams would miss two weeks with an ankle injury” be anything other than a value-free statement of fact, they ask. A person who only reports facts cannot be accused of being engaged in propaganda. This lack of opinion content also insulates in-house reporters from offering particularly critical assessments of the team. Chapter 4 takes up the question of tone more completely, but in general in-house reporters want their work to read like journalism. In-

house reporters pitch their work practices to this idea, performing a professional identity that is rooted in facts.

The beat writer is a journalistic creation, a way for news organizations to manage flows of information (Tuchman, 1978). The idea that the job could be done outside the context of journalism runs counter to its basic definition. Yet the presence of information on a team site is at the same time a commercial strategy. This is why news content production is often part of television partnerships struck between teams and leagues (Fortunato, 2013a). Identifying as a beat writer is an attempt by in-house writers to claim a place in journalism.

Mixed relations with the independent press

Part of being a beat writer is competing with other reporters for stories about the team. This will be explored more completely in Chapter 5, but on a day-to-day basis, in-house reporters interact regularly with the rest of the press pack. As one writer put it:

We spend so much time with those guys, we're very very similar. We all work in the same media workroom a lot during the week, we're all at the same press conference, we're all sitting next to each other in the press box during home games, during road games. So, in that sense we're all kind of covering the same thing.

And while not all in-house reporters share media workspaces, constant interaction helps them establish claim to be working in similar ways as the independent media. This is the boundary work of expansion backed up through practical similarities.

Most view themselves as engaged in competition with their independent counterparts for readership. Some of this occurs at the story level, "I can only speak from my side of it. But I hold myself to the same standard. I want to beat those guys," one in-house reporter said. "We love to get scoops when we can. We love to be first when we can." That point was echoed by others.

Breaking news, injuries, signings, all those kind of things, I compete to be the first one to get that kind of stuff. I don't treat it any different than I would have at the (newspaper). I want to be first, everybody does, so I build relationships and do those things to try and get to be first on a lot of stories.

Articulating this competitive relationship with independent reporters minimizes the differences between the two roles. The boundary work of expansion in-house reporters engage in seeks to minimize differences between the roles.

One in-house writer defined his competitive approach a little differently, putting it in the context of local reporters trying to beat national ones. He said his relationships with the independent reporters assigned to the team had improved with time, as those writers better understood the constraints he works under. Despite being an in-house writer, he views himself as just another local guy trying to beat national reporters on stories.

I would say the intensity is still there, but I think the camaraderie is better. I still think we're all pretty competitive. I think local beat guys are all fighting the same thing. The local beat reporters and the website reporters are all battling the nationals. It's very tough to break a story now if you're a local guy, because everything is broken nationally on (League) Network and ESPN. ... ESPN and (the league network) monopolize the scoops. There's a lot of reasons for it, but that's one thing that the local beat guys and the website guys, that's something we're all trying to battle.

This writer casts his lot with the challenges faced by independent writers, erasing some of the distinctions between them. Identifying yourself as facing the same challenges as local independent journalists helps create commonality. This is another way the in-house writer identifies with the local beat writer, by sharing a common enemy. At least one other writer mentioned this as a challenge as well. This boundary work of expansion is at play here as well. Shared goals of being first represent meaningful similarities, as do shared rivals.

In many cases, though, team-based sites do limit the news their writers can break. Scandals or intra-team conflicts will always be reported first in independent outlets. Transactions are subject to rules governing what team employees can say about players under contract to other clubs. One former newspaper writer said he felt very competitive with the independent beat reporters, which often left him feeling frustrated with the limitations he faced.

I do (feel competitive) ... But I also feel like I'm behind the eight ball. (Newspaper reporters) can call the general manager whenever they want. I cannot. I have to go through my PR department. When they find out I have gone around them, that's when I end up in trouble. It's a very convoluted and screwy situation. ... The people that I feel I am competing with are posting much faster than me. ... It's a very very difficult situation. Somebody less experienced or less tolerant would not be able to handle this.

Some of the reporters say their own competitiveness with the newspapers was unexpected and, in fact, not part of the calculation made by the sporting organization that hired them. One former news and wire service reporter said competitiveness was something he brought to the job. "I don't think the people who hired me thought I'd be a competitor," he said. This reflects the boundary work of expansion by the in-house reporters in that it stresses the similarities between the two roles. In both cases, they brought competitiveness with them from their newspaper roles. For the second writer, that competitiveness was something he created as a function of transplanting his journalistic identity. Those claims help build in a measure of autonomy, which will be discussed further below.

Scoops aside, the more meaningful competition may occur at the outlet level. In-house reporters pose a jurisdictional threat to independent ones because they may siphon away readership.

We're competing to be what fans would consider to be the No. 1 source for (team) news and information. We want to have the most in depth features. When it comes to our game coverage, we want to have the most complete game coverage you can find. When it comes to videos, highlights, press conference video, of course our stories. We want to be complete and thorough. When it comes to that kind stuff, we absolutely want to be able to say we can stand against anyone out there and have the best content out there.

That means using the access, the ability to post unlimited video and the unbounded space of a website to tell stories that the independent press no longer have the newshole, staff or inclination to cover.

Some in-house writers said they were just providing the content independent outlets stopped producing. At least one said the in-house site's biggest competition was not the local newspaper but the network of blogs devoted to the team. He said that the audience for a team site likely was seeking many sources of information beyond the local newspaper. In-house reporters had an advantage over those sources because of their superior access to athletes and team personnel. In fact, in-house reporters often sound like newspaper reporters complaining about bloggers and others who repackaging the work of others to garner pageviews and clicks. As one in-house reporter put it:

There are other people out there, like blogs or aggregators, who take what we do and put it out there. If we put something out on Twitter at practice, like the coach changes the (line-up), somebody will take those and put them up on a blog and write a big story about it. It's tough because there are people who take what you do, your quotes, and write a story out of them.

Sports reporters have long treated access as an important professional marker, a form of boundary work that devalued the work of outsiders. In-house reporters have adopted the same stance toward those outlets. In fact, it may be an even more effective form of boundary work for in-house reporters because in many cases they have greater access than even independent reporters. From a competitive standpoint, this plays to in-house reporters' strengths.

In many cases, interviewees said they functioned as full members of the team press corps, maintaining cordial relationships with their colleagues. This included some information sharing, especially on non-exclusive stories. "The beat reporter for the (local paper), we share information," one writer said. "If he's late to practice and something happens, I let him know. Same if he's there before I am." The stories may be a little different in tone, but he said having another person doing a similar job helped keep him sharp. Another in-house reporter said he was treated as a full member of the press pack, right down to recording a weekly podcast with one of

the independent reporters assigned to the team. In doing so, the beat writer and in-house reporter position themselves as equals, meaning boundary work is occurring on both sides of the relationship. An in-house writer who has achieved that status means that independent reporters are not trying to diminish his role.

Other times in-house reporters perceive the boundary work of expulsion being used against them. At least one reporter described outright hostility from the rest of the independent press on his beat, “There’s some more friction there, some resentment about the perception that I have more access than when I used to be one of them. They call me ‘Baghdad Bob,’” that writer said. In this case the independent journalists invoke a widely agreed upon caricature of public relations work in order to marginalize the in-house reporter. That name came up in more than one interview.

More common, however is being ignored by the independent media. Reporters do not always acknowledge press releases when they report on a formal news announcement. If they consider the in-house reporters on par with the public relations department, then it makes sense not to cite that work either. As one in-house writer said it:

I don’t get the sense that the more traditional outlets really view us as competition. When we are first on a story, most people aren’t giving us credit for having scoops or contacts or things like that. They figure we work for the team and happen to know those things, which really couldn’t be further from the truth. So y’know, when we’re doing well people just think of us as being an extension of the (team). I think we just kind of fade into the background for most of the competing outlets, which, I get it, but I don’t necessarily think it’s accurate.

This writer views independent media as competition, but assumes the feeling is not mutual. And why would independent reporters want to see their in-house counterparts as competition? After all, it means going against people with structural advantages for stories. Expulsion helps insulate independent reporters from that competition.

It is becoming more difficult for independent reporters to ignore in-house media, many interviewees said. “I think at first, the more traditional organizations struggled to acknowledge that they were in competition,” one writer said. “It’s really easy to dismiss it as a team site. But when you have 3 million Twitter followers, people pay attention. Old people are slow to come around on the newer forms of journalism.” Independent reporters have downplayed the idea that they could be competing with in-house reporters because they do not want to acknowledge them as competition. The competitive approach in-house reporters describe represents a means of putting themselves on equal footing with the independent press, the boundary work of expansion. This writer even calls his work a newer form of journalism. There is some pretty clear professional self-preservation in that on the part of independent journalists. Competing with someone who has inside access is a losing proposition even for the most plugged-in reporters. Defining them as outside the circle of legitimate competition protects journalistic self-concept in time when new employment arrangements are eating into the exclusivity over information that independent reporters previously enjoyed.

Know your role, do your job

In-house reporters, then, see themselves as doing reporting work rather than team strategic communication. As team or league employees, however, they also work within a corporate structure, one that never previously supported these types of employees and work functions. This section examines how in-house reporters feel they fit into corporate cultures not designed with journalism in mind. The boundary work in-house reporters engage in within their teams – articulating boundaries between in-house reporting and other team functions – seeks to create some separation. This allows in-house reporters to claim a measure of independence.

The interview subjects for this project fall into two classifications, those who work for mlb.com and those who work directly for sites controlled by teams in the other three leagues or

college athletic departments. In 2000, Major League Baseball created a company called MLB Advanced Media, centralizing its online operations. Owned equally by each of the 30 baseball clubs, the company has emerged as a leader in video streaming technology, which it licenses to many other outlets (Brown, 2014; Popper, 2015). MLBAM has turned into a billion-dollar subsidiary for the league owners (Brown, 2014), one of the more profitable aspects of the sport. MLBAM operates the editorial arm of the team websites. All editorial employees – writers and editors – work for this company rather than any specific team.

The other three major North American professional leagues operate according to individualized structures. Leagues share back end technology and design with their teams, but the editorial operations are separate. The National Football League operates its own website through a branch called NFL Media, which runs a number of league media ventures. The National Basketball Association contracts with Turner Sports (part of Time Warner) to operate its central website. Writers for nba.com are employees of Turner rather than of the league. In both cases, teams control content on their own websites. The National Hockey League's online media presence was similar to that of the NFL, although in August 2015 it contracted with MLB Advanced Media to run its online operations, including the 30 team websites. It is unclear as of this writing how the NHL's team websites will change in response to this new approach. College athletics have few centralized guidelines for media management.

[MLB.com](#)

Since 2001, mlb.com has employed “site reporters” to cover each of the league's teams for that club's official website. Each of mlb.com's site reporters is supervised by a regional editor, of which there are three. The regional editor system matches Major League Baseball's divisional structure, so all beat writers for East Division teams (both the American and National

Leagues have East, Central and West Divisions) report to the same editor. Those editors represent the site reporters' primary point of contact with mlb.com's editorial structure. Regional editors also are based around the country. Regional editors report to an editor who reports to mlb.com's editor-in-chief, Dinn Mann. and has remained in the post Mann took the job in 2001 after serving as sports editor and then Deputy Managing Editor of the Kansas City Star and other newspapers ("Deputy ME at The Kansas City Star takes new post," 2001).

Relationships between writers and editors often are facilitated by technology. "Because we're covering 30 different teams and spread out all around the country, and being an Internet company, we do rely on the technology and the remote access," one mlb.com writer said. "It's not a 1975 newsroom anyway. That's probably wise." Many writers said mlb.com had been characterized by low turnover among the site reporters. That means it boasts a lot of experience among its writing corps, something that the relative stability of the league-operated site has been able to provide, especially in comparison to newspapers. As another reporter said, much of the writing staff are "guys who have been doing this job 20 or 30 years and that's no exaggeration."

A Major League Baseball team plays 162 games in 183 days during the regular season, preceded by a month of exhibition games to prepare for the year. This means work routines at mlb.com are built around games. A writer interacts with his editor when he sends budget lines early in the day describing the non-game content he plans to file. These stories may be trend stories, short features, injury reports, or news about player transactions. Writers report these stories during the pregame media availabilities when locker rooms are open for player and manager interviews. Writers usually drive the story generation process, given that they are more immersed in the day-to-day news of the team than a remote editor might be. As one writer said:

Being a beat writer for a baseball team, I'm sure it's like that in the other sports too, you kind of know what your stories are going to be that particular day. You usually kind of

decide what's being written. You'll get some feedback from your regional editor on hey, you might want to tackle this or tackle that, but, generally, most days you're kind of on your own.

When story generation becomes a "two-way street," that usually means the writer and the editor bouncing ideas off each other. "There will be story ideas that come my way, assignments that come my ways, and I'll pitch ideas. In that regard, I don't think it's all that different than a traditional newsroom," one writer said.

Writers say they periodically use their editors as sounding boards or when they have questions about how to potentially approach a story. "Sometimes I seek (his input) out," a writer said. "It's not that I do it to curry his favor, I kind of subconsciously know I'm doing the right thing when I consult him and often something good with come out of it." Another viewed the lack of input from bosses as vote of confidence in the work being produced, "My editor trusts me to let him know what's going on with the (team) and keep him (informed)," that writer said. "I don't get many extra assignments per se because I try to keep on top of things. Maybe there are some other writers that might have more dialogue going on."

For the most part, mlb.com reporters viewed these interactions as similar to what many had experienced in newsrooms. They viewed the general operational autonomy they had as an expression of their own independence. They control their own news agendas, telling the home office what matters rather than vice versa. Writers who view themselves as journalists spending their days producing stories that they select and report have no problem viewing themselves as part of the profession.

On gamedays, site reporters work with a producer based in the New York office. Producers oversee one of the day's games (A full schedule will be 15 games, although occasionally weather postponements result in doubleheaders, when teams play twice in a day).

Writers work with a rotating cast of producers, although some said they worked with the same person regularly. Producers edit and post work from writers covering both teams, as well as manage the web presentation of each day's game and post updates to main website.

Writers file their pregame story before first pitch. After editing by the game producer and a "QA" staffer, it is posted on the site. Only employees of MLB Advanced Media see stories before they are posted. No writers described any exceptions to this rule. Pregame stories match the "early story" newspaper reporters usually produce. Those reports used to be targeted at earlier editions of the newspaper, but are now posted on the internet. Mlb.com posts these reports at the same time as independent reporters. The team's site then becomes part of the accelerated news cycle. All participate in it, underscoring the similarities between independent and in-house media.

In terms of access, Major League Baseball teams treat the editorial employees of MLBAM just as any other reporter assigned to cover the team. Writers for team sites say they receive the same access to the team and league officials as those who write for independent outlets. "Literally the easiest thing I can use to explain it, me and the (local newspaper) are the only two entities that travel on the road. I get treated just like the (local newspaper)," said one reporter. They believe that differential treatment would create problems for teams, who need to maintain relationships with independent beat writers. As one writer said:

I'm not having stuff spoon fed to me. If you see as a story with my name on it, that didn't come from the team. It's not like they said, well let's give to him he's (team).com, let's not give it to the (competition). The (team doesn't) play favorites. They certainly don't. You would definitely know about it pretty quickly if they did, because other publications would have a lot to say about that.

During games, writers engage on social media while they produce a running story. Heavy on play-by-play details, they file this story with six outs remaining, so it can be edited and posted

immediately after the game ends. These stories will have to be revised if the result changes in the final inning. Writers also produce text to accompany short video clips of highlight reel plays that may occur. Writers said this use of video represents one of mlb.com's advantages over independent news outlets that cover the team. Those short stories with highlights attached often drive traffic they said, helping to build the site's audience.

Locker rooms reopen 10 minutes after the game, allowing writers to gather quotations and fresh perspectives from the manager and players. In-house reporters file a writethru about 60 minutes after the last pitch, similar to independent reporters. The site also produces previews for the following day's game, which usually post around midday prior to the game. The beat writers interviewed for this project usually do not write these stories. The site does not differentiate in any way between its regular reporters and the interns and fill-ins who sometimes pick up stories.

In the offseason, baseball remains on the front burner for mlb.com. Writers continue to be responsible for producing regular content. The league helps fill this calendar with various league meetings, which often serve as focal points for player transactions. But sometimes the pickings for stories can be slim.

The way the (local newspaper) covers the (team), you can alternate the beat reporter taking this week or next week. If there's nothing really going on you can fill in with (hockey) coverage or (college sports), whatever. With mlb.com, we want something on the site fresh almost every day at least. So Monday through Friday I'm filing at least a story every morning. It's a mix of features, and sometimes mailboxes where I'm answering fans' questions. Sometimes it's short little stories on injury updates or free agency stuff if something happened. Sometimes it's tough to come up with different angles, but it's what we want to do. We want to keep generating content to our site. The big deal with us is to increase traffic because once we get them to the site, there's so much they can click on that can make Major League Baseball money, to be honest.

Mlb.com would be more likely therefore to cover charity events or school visits as a means of producing fresh news for the site. Newspapers often would avoid these stories unless tied to a larger angle.

From a competitive standpoint, mlb.com team sites continue to provide fresh information to a team's fans even in moments when that team would not rate coverage within a local newspaper. For people who prefer baseball to other sports, a team site is often the only option during long stretches of the winter. In this regard, the independent site still serves a marketing function. It maintains a baseball agenda during periods in which the independent media's attention shifts to other sports. In-house reporters view this as something that makes their jobs more difficult than independent reporters, a bit of expulsion as they downplay the offseason work of independent reporters.

In late January and early February, as spring training approaches, the writers often produce preview materials in accordance with a centrally maintained calendar. This is one time of year where assignments are centralized by the editorial managers.

They will give us, leading up into spring training they've given us assignments. Today we want to do something on the top prospects heading into spring training. Tomorrow we want do something on players who are on the rebound, so everyone at mlb.com has the same assignment leading up to spring training. Most of the time on a day to day basis, it's my responsibility to communicate with them to tell them what's going on.

The editing structure, therefore may come to play a larger role in the process of story production at that point of the season.

Those who have come from newspaper backgrounds say the editorial structure and news routines feel similar to what they came from. "While certainly not exactly the same as working for a newspaper, it's still pretty close," one writer said. This is a function, they say, of the editorial system being designed by newspaper people. Indeed, mlb.com appears to have gone to great lengths to appropriate the news routines of the independent media. The output – a pregame story and game story – match what newspaper reporters produce, although being online only may shift the way the mlb.com presents content. In all cases, the decisions appear to be geared

toward aligning the work of the site and its writers with the ideals of journalistic identity. This includes disclaimers at the bottom of the stories asserting each story was independently produced. The organizational structure of mlb.com appears designed to help its writers assert a journalistic identity, “I’d much rather be a journalist at a newspaper or at mlb.com than I would in another league where there’s more of a PR side to it. It’s nice not having to deal with that as much,” one writer said.

It appears that mlb.com writers articulate a clear boundary between what mlb.com does and what the team sites in other leagues do. These writers point to not being a team employee as a central distinction between themselves those who write for non-centralized sites. Even as they acknowledge that their work serves a marketing function for the league and its teams, they view the autonomy they have from the management of the club as a key distinction between themselves and other in-house reporters. The boundaries drawn here are meant to locate mlb.com alongside the independent media.

The non-centralized model

The online structures for the other three professional leagues and college athletic departments follow no clear template. NFL, NBA, and NHL teams may house their in-house content production within their marketing departments, their public relations departments, or within a standalone digital media unit. Table 3-1 shows where each team’s media guide lists its in-house media staff as working.

Table 3-1. Department in which writers for team website work

League	Marketing	PR	Standalone	Other	Not listed	None
NBA	5	3	14	0	4	3
NHL	5	7	12	2	2	2
NFL	4	3	23	1	0	0

Note: Media guides were available for two teams, the Toronto Maple Leafs (NHL) and Kansas City Chiefs (NFL).

In-house media production largely operates in standalone digital units. These departments often include both in-house writers and social media staff, meaning teams concentrate content creation in one administrative unit. Some teams include their broadcast departments within those units as well. Writers were considered part of the PR department if they reported through the media relations department, the part of the team also tasked with working with independent reporters. In a few cases, bylined reporters for the team site also were listed in media guides as public relations staff. In some cases the writers that appeared on the team site were not listed within the team's media guide at all. In many cases this was mixed, in which some writers found on the team's website were listed in the media guide while others were not. For instance, the NFL's Miami Dolphins listed four contributors on their website, but only of one was named in the media guide (in this case in the Digital Media Department). Only five of the 92 teams in these three leagues did not produce bylined news content on its website. In those cases, most of the stories posted on the site were team press releases published without bylines, news produced by the league's central site (like nhl.com) or independent news agencies (The Associated or Canadian Press). In the latter case, in-house sites housed fully independent news.

In some NBA media guides, writers for the team site may not be listed in the staff directories published by the teams. Some are hired freelancers, who produce content for the team website without working as a fulltime team employee. The Indiana Pacers and Los Angeles Lakers do not list writers among the staff in their own publications, but the reporters' Twitter bios claim a close affiliation with the team. Others are employed as part of a team-operated media network that is treated as separate from the team. Many NBA media guides also include a section where teams list the traveling media that cover them, and include in-house reporters in

that group. This is another way teams seek to position their writers as operating in the same general area as independent reporters.

The writers' titles in their stafflines (placed beneath their bylines) also represent the ways they are being pitched to the audience. Within the NFL most notably, these sites borrow heavily from journalism when it comes to how their stories are pitched. Table 3-2 shows the titles employed on these sites (which come to more than 32 because many employ more than one writer).

Table 3-2. Title listing for in-house reporters	
Title	Frequency
Writer (Lead, Senior, Staff)	19
Editor (Web, hybrid writer/editor)	11
Reporter	6
Columnist	4
Insider	3
No title	3
Contributor	2
Other	2

These differ from the official titles listed in the media guide, many of which include references to digital content production. Very few of the websites for NBA or NHL teams included stafflines with their stories.

These counts are merely snapshots in time, however. Some experienced in-house writers have seen their positions change over time, including moving from department to department.

As one writer said:

For the first five years ... the job was in the PR department. They changed the structure, they split the PR department from the website and gave us our department, (name of department). I no longer report to the PR director, but instead to the director of the media group.

Another said his position had moved departments three times during his tenure, "When I first started I was actually under (public relations)," the writer said. "Then for a short time I believe I was in community relations. Then under our most reorganization I went to marketing and have been for the last couple of years." In both of these cases, the writers said the result of the moves had been a greater sense of autonomy. In the latter case, the writer said his new role had allowed

him to construct work routines increasingly like the independent beat writers who cover the team; he now rarely works in the office among other considerations.

It is difficult to say whether placement on the organizational chart has any definite connection with editorial processes and journalistic identity on the part of writers. In these cases the in-house writer's department moved away from public relations, which likely was helpful in constructing a journalistic identity. The positions as they evolve seem to acquire more elements that look like journalism. The sample for this project did not include managers who could speak to the big-picture strategic concerns, such as how in-house sites sought to position reporters. This would be an important future project to further flesh out this work.

Interview data suggests that writers in standalone departments have a different work experience than those who work in marketing or public relations departments. Writers in digital media departments described work routines structured around producing editorial content and incentives that align with those of news reporters. While they still have many of the same mandates as other departments – putting out information that casts the team as positively as possible – they use techniques and communication channels that carry different audience expectations than those departments. These expectations may help in-house reporters as they try to align themselves with independent journalists.

Digital media departments often create differentiation in editorial staffs that looks more like a newspaper. They may include multiple writers, and perhaps a columnist and even people who give fantasy football advice. The presence of other writers within a work group gives in-house reporters people to bounce ideas off and split up reporting duties. Some departments have a standalone editor position, but more commonly these departments have hierarchies among writers. One interviewee described his relationship with a fellow writer in his department, “He’s

kind of ambiguously my co-writer, ambiguously my boss.” Digital media groups do have supervisors who often would be involved if major issues were at stake. Often the people in these departments will have media backgrounds as well, meaning similar approaches to information.

One writer said working within a standalone digital media department was part of what made moving to an in-house position attractive. The organizational chart reflected the independence he wanted to maintain.

It was important to me to know that this job was not part of PR, but of digital media. It was a department that was being formed. Other teams aren’t like that. My position at other teams is part of the PR department and they’re vetted. Some writers have to have their stuff go through the general manager before it can be posted. So, I think we’re in the forefront of kind of what teams are doing here in a sense that they hired newspaper guys. When you hire newspaper guys there’s going to be a code of ethics and code of conduct there, they’re going to want to do things the way they did at the newspaper.

Being within the organization but outside the public relations department reflects an important piece of self-identification for this writer. Stressing the distinction between his work and those who are tasked with shaping perceptions of the team is at the root of his professional self-identity. In-house reporters largely align themselves with journalists because they are claiming the authority that comes with journalistic status. That means operating separately from PR.

Some in-house writers believe a content-focused department makes for a stronger product. “Journalism is lacking in some team sites because they don’t have trained journalists or an editor,” said one writer who works in a standalone media unit. Another writer echoed those sentiments:

I look at the teams where they have editorial under PR and I find that it’s a little more bland, they’re not willing to take the same risks, a lot of the pieces come across as though they’re written by PR people, which they were.

Most of the writers interviewed believed that a more journalistic approach made for a stronger in-house media operation. Another writer used his site’s failures to make this claim.

We don't know what we want to be. We want to make money on the website but on the other hand, we don't want to generate content that generates more views for the advertisers. And at some point, you just learn to pick and choose your battles.

Journalistic content, he argues, brings in readers who want news and analysis about their favorite teams. Choosing to back away from that limits what team websites are able to accomplish commercially. These statements all assume that real journalism is, on some level, possible at in-house sites. It also suggests that journalism is what readers want and is even profitable, something independent journalists might question. The expansion of the professional boundaries continues here. In-house reporters construct sports journalism as properly rigorous and best serving readers. These are the traits in-house reporters seek to import into their own professional identities. This is part of the boundary work of expansion that they engage in.

Teams position their in-house writers in different ways as well, although very few use disclaimers the way mlb.com does. Some give their in-house writers a separate web page that looks different from the team web space to post their material. While existing within the league's web space and subject to league rules, these sites create visual delineation between the in-house reporter's work and the team-branded site. One writer who works with this arrangement described the process this way:

I'll write something and send it to the person who's managing the website that day and our social channels. And basically it's their decision about whether or not they want it. So the way we have it set up is all my writing goes on a blog ... And while technically it's part of the (league), if you go to (the team site) it's not present on there for the most part. ... The reason we've done that is to try and create a bit of delineation between what (I) write and what the (team is saying) saying. At least it puts some visual space between my work and the official work of the team."

He believes the differentiation is effective in keeping the team and the writer separate in the minds of readers. This works to construct an independent identity for an in-house reporter,

building some distance between the team and the writer in a way the audience can see. If claims of journalistic identity are about credibility, perhaps this helps enhance those efforts.

At teams where writers work in pre-existing departments, they often find themselves on their own in ways that can be challenging. The in-house reporter occupies a unique role in an organization and these writers find few people who share their worldview. “I don’t think there’s anybody that I work with now that’s worked in a news organization, so the mentality is different,” one writer said. “Everyone I work with has always worked in public relations or social media. There’s just a different mentality.” Lone journalists working for teams say they face a range of challenges, from getting clean copy onto the site to finding guidance when faced with complicated situations. Many working in a standalone capacity say they have no formal editors. They have supervisors, but not people who view their work from the perspective of content production. This creates both mechanical and organizational challenges.

Mechanically, lacking an editor makes posting clean copy a challenge sometimes. “I’m no stranger to editing my own work and editing others’ work and I think I’m fairly good at it,” one writer said. “Obviously there’s stuff I don’t catch and I’d prefer to have that extra layer there, but it’s something I’m comfortable with.” Another writer described it similarly, saying there is no one in place to ask him questions about the directions his work is taking. “Within the day-to-day, self-editing is a really new experience after 11 years in newspapers. There’s a structure, but I have a lot more latitude than one would think within an organization,” he said. The first writer said that lacking an editor created a big challenge in his first season working in this role, “I had never been through an (professional sports) season before,” he said. “Everyone in our group got hired in the summer. Having now been through a full season and going into my

first offseason, things will be a lot more streamlined.” In practice this meant a lack of clear guidance on how to handle sensitive issues when they arise.

(There is the) digital media coordinator, who is technically my boss, who I report to, I say ‘Hey can we talk about this,’ but it’s pretty much up to my discretion. It’s certainly standard things that I can make an article out of it. What I don’t try to do is try to create a story because I’m the team writer. I ‘m not going to try to stir the pot. That wouldn’t make sense for someone in my role. I’ll get into something that coach says that I think is interesting, I’ll put it in the article.

The mentality is less about using content to make a ripple and more about having it available to involve the team in the flow of information.

A writer for a college athletic department says he has no clear bosses and works with different people depending on the specific assignment. The expectations for his output vary. “There’s no one I report to directly. There are people I speak with, not speak to. I have multiple overseers more than bosses. It changes who is overseeing what in athletics.” Newsrooms have clearer lines of authority. This writer did not view this as a source of job stress however, but rather just a function of his position. As someone nearing retirement age, he thought he worried less about fitting in.

Journalism practices imported

Those who come from journalistic backgrounds find themselves trying to embed some practices of independent news work within their roles. One is speed. One in-house writer described reengineering his game stories so they could be posted before anyone else’s. “My story will get up on the website faster than anyone else,” he said. “It may be a different kind of story than some of the other publications, but we’re going to get you the basic information, hopefully with a little insight and spin to it, before everyone else.” Another writer said they tried to have something up 30 minutes after each game, because data suggested readers stop looking for

content at that point. A third writer said he negotiated a blog site with the team so he could have stories about night games ready when his audience woke up the next morning

After the game I write at night, I'll finish up my writing at 2 a.m., a lot of times later on the road. That's always been my schedule. You work in sports, you're a second-shift worker. You don't come into the office at 9 a.m. Well, they all do. They asked me, just send us the stories and we'll post them when we get in at 9 o'clock in the morning. I said, well you can't do that. You got to have them up after the games, as soon as you can after the game. People want to read after the game or first thing in the morning when they get up at 5 or 6 or whatever. So I'm telling them that you have to do this faster. You have to think journalistically because for them it was whenever, because they're 9-5 workers. So there would be things like that. I'm not working for journalistic people, so I'm the one setting the agenda of the journalism part because they don't view it that way because people who I work for are marketing people, which is how it is with most of these team websites are not trained in news, deadlines, breaking news, so I initiate most of them, when there's something going on, I tell them, I'm going to do this or I'm going to do that. They almost never ask me to do it. I just do it because I know what's news and what the people want.

The journalistic approach, as constructed by these writers, often fits poorly within a non-journalistic organization. Working to alter those routines for journalistic reasons is a means of reinforcing professional identity. Inserting those new practices into their organizations reflects boundary work. Forcing marketing staffers and others to adjust to journalistic practices helps dramatize differences between traditional team publicity work and in-house reporting. Embedding those into a team structure helps reinforce their identity. They are teaching the team about journalism rather than learning about public relations from their new employers.

Some unique reporting arrangements exist as well. One writer said he does not really have a place on the team organizational chart in that he reports directly to team ownership.

Reporter: We're a little bit outside the structure because nobody really does what I do. It's basically a newspaper covering the organization. But I do answer to the front office. I answer to the people who own the team. That is my responsibility.

Q: So your direct report is the top of the chain, I guess

Reporter: I report right to the folks that hired me.

Serving at the pleasure of the owner allows him to operate independently of the other departments. Yet this underlines the fraught nature of these claims of independence. He is distinct from public relations, but reports directly to the team's ultimate authority.

The organizational chart defines boundaries between jobs within a team. That in-house reporters do fit easily into those charts becomes an important resource for boundary work. In-house reporters differentiate themselves from their employers, a means of preserving autonomy and continuing to claim an identity as a journalist. Doing so may allow in-house writers to push for greater autonomy when the possibilities present themselves. This is easier at *mlb.com*, where writers work more independently. At team-based sites, reporters work hard to preserve that distance. This boundary work is related directly to their claims for credibility. To have professional value, they must be seen as honest brokers of information. Ensuring the team gives them the leeway to do that helps them is something they have to work for. Preserving those boundaries goes to maintaining the value of their professional role.

Public relations is spin, not truth

Within a team structure, in-house reporters are very clear about building a boundary between themselves and the public relations department. One writer captured the relationships this way, "Journalism and PR inevitably go head to head. PR wants control and journalism wants to tell stories and let people know what's going on." When a team loses, a coach is fired or a player arrested, most in-house reporters say they try to write honestly and factually. As the same writer said when talking about the way he chooses to cover things, "I am hired to put out and relate content on the team ... I work for them, but there's no PR in what I put out. If there's a release, we put it out as a release. What I do is purely journalism."

This writer and many others interviewed rejected suggestions that what they did could be viewed as public relations. They acknowledge a promotional component – they only have jobs

because the team wants the information they produce circulating. But independent journalists gain access to sports organizations using the same logic. In-house reporters reject the claim that their work can be viewed as public relations based on organizational relationships and work practices. To them, public relations is a defined set of practices and they say they do different things. “The PR guys definitely don’t think (my work) is public relations,” one writer said. “I’m not typing up press releases. I’m not asking the easy questions or the questions they want to hear.” Other writers made similar points. “It’s certainly not PR because I don’t work for a PR firm, I don’t work for a PR department and I’m not told what to write,” he said. “All those things are associated with PR. So I have complete control over what I do, what I write, what I see. And I’m not relegated to anything. So I’d certainly consider what I do journalism.”

The distinctions posited by writers here include control over content and the freedom to question the team’s position on an issue, issues fully explored in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. These writers refer to their work processes and output as journalistic because they work in opposition to what they define as public relations. As Abbott and Schudson have argued, journalism’s core jurisdictional claim and its ethical canon seek to codify a separation from the publicity industry. In-house writers’ focus on this core distinction is a central definitional claim.

Most in-house writers said they received little help from their public relations staff. Even when there are generally good relationships, in-house media say they tend to operate independently from the PR staff in terms of setting up interviews and other functions

I have a great relationship with them. I probably see them more than anybody else would just because I share a building with them. But I don’t think we get anything in the way of preferential treatment. I can say pretty definitively that we’re not getting any perks that any other media outlet wouldn’t. Which honestly, I would prefer if we did because we all are technically on the same team. But again, if people think we have some kind of leg up, I think that would be a mistake.

Most said they worked to arrange their own interviews rather than relying on the media relations departments to furnish players, which is standard practice for independent reporters. Sometimes that means learning of news when press releases come out, “My department is separate from PR. We get information when other media do,” said one writer. “We don’t get a heads up just because we’re in the building.”

Others described outright hostility in their relationships with their PR departments. “The PR department is never willing to work with us,” one writer said. “I was looking for a player once, they didn’t get back to me for five weeks.” This stands in contrast to the rest of press corps, which has the ability to call team personnel whenever they want or choose whatever story angles they care to. It may be that public relations people are resisting what they view as incursions into their jurisdiction from team media.

Some teams get it, in terms that you can use internal media as a resource, whereas ours looks at it as why do we have this? What’s the purpose? Why do we need more coverage of the team, or basically (why are we) using resources on this, we have so much coverage outside? In a lot of ways, we’re partially neglected by our PR staff, probably because they don’t feel the need to massage that relationship. They basically feel like (we’re) not going to write anything negative, so why should we give them anything? I would say that’s one of the toughest parts of the job, we’re kind of just left on our own. ... I get that sense from a lot of people working in my position. Either their PR gets it and they get a lot of access or their PR is like, why do we need this? Or on the flip side, this should be under our control? I think that’s a big part of it too. PR feels like this is internal communication going out to the public this should be coming from them. Yet it appears public relations staff also have an interest in maintaining the boundary between themselves and the in-house reporters. This may suit both sides. Doing so makes life more difficult in a variety of ways, but the distinction being drawn may help both departments. PR people can protect their relationships with the external media and in-house media can use those tensions to define themselves as journalists who have a contentious relationship with the publicity side. Everyone may be reinforcing their roles through these interactions. Boundary work is not limited to one occupational group.

Conclusion

Gieryn (1999) described boundary work as cultural cartography. Professions propose a map of cultural authority, using to borders to define relationships between themselves and other groups. The boundary work strategies they engage in are aimed at convincing other actors – especially other professional groups and the public -- to recognize those distinctions and treat them as meaningful. Journalism's jurisdiction over news requires that the rest of society accept its claim of cultural authority, the idea that the news journalists produce is useful. In-house reporters propose a map of authority in which they overlap with independent sports journalism and that maintains some of the separations that characterize the pre-digital era.

In-house reporters engage in boundary work to define themselves as similar to their independent counterparts. Many who came from newspapers view in-house work as extension of their previous careers. Their professional identity remained static even as their job circumstances changed. In-house reporters view themselves as beat writers, adopting a journalistic analogue focused on information rather than opinion. They engage in the same practices, another way collapsing any distinctions between the two groups. At the same time, they also draw boundaries between themselves and their employers. In-house reporters use their journalistic identity when they work to build reporting routines into organizations that are just learning to communicate this way. They reject the public relations label in order to underscore the difference between their work and what teams have done traditionally. They view themselves as employees apart from their coworkers.

The goal of this boundary work is to convince the public to see them as journalists. In doing so, they draw on traditional conceptions of the profession, ones rooted in facts, independence and rejection of strategic communication. They are telling the truth as they understand it, not speaking for a team, which is how they believe journalists operate. Those

boundaries are important to them as they address the audience. If the reading public views them as journalists, then they will have the authority to tell stories about the team. If not, their work will have little value to fans, and, by extension, their employers. Boundary work is a public process. That in-house reporters address themselves to more traditional conceptions of journalism suggests the field's enduring power as a cultural category.

At the same time, their own claims problematize those practices and ethics. As discussed in Chapter 2, sports reporting's status in journalism has long been questioned, with many inside the field and wondering if it really belongs. These criticisms have been rooted in an ethical critique of sports reporting. In-house reporters problematize practice-based professional definitions. If people actively being paid by the teams and leagues are doing the same work as independent sports journalists, what does that say about the rigor of the latter group? Can these practices and ethics be detached from journalism's normative claims to authority? Chapter 4 digs deeper into how in-house reporters define the terms they deploy in order to claim membership in the journalism profession.

Chapter 4: Getting into position: How in-house reporters adapt core journalism ethics

Chapter 3 explored the ways in-house reporters construct their own professional identities and define their relationships with other actors in the sports media system. These articulations represent the boundary work of expansion, the carving out of a jurisdiction over sports news for themselves. In-house reporters tend to adopt the map of cultural authority put forth by independent journalists, while locating themselves within the profession (Gieryn, 1999). Most interviewees that left independent news still express a strong journalistic identity, which becomes a tool by which they manage the clear ethical conflicts their employment relationships raise. They point to practical similarities between themselves and independent journalists to make the case that they are engaged in the same work. They also underline the distinctions between themselves and the sports organizations who pay them, with special attention paid to drawing a line between themselves and the public relations departments. In-house reporters define a place for themselves in the sports media network in order to claim cultural authority for themselves and the information they produce.

This chapter digs further into how in-house reporters articulate definitions of core journalism ethics in order to embed themselves in the professional community. It finds that in-house reporters rank accuracy as journalism's most important professional value, using that to organize their routines and shape the how they produce a range of stories. It also shows that they use the distinctions they see between themselves and their employers as a means of claiming independence, which sits at the root of accounts of journalistic credibility. Yet it also finds that this approach to ethics may act as a check on them, in that it constructs the team as the arbiter of truth and proposes for it more greater authority over information. In-house reporters engage in

boundary work to situate themselves professionally, but by extension extend the influence of the team's brand by giving it greater control over information.

A journalism of facts

A profession employs boundary work in response to specific challenges (Gieryn, 1983).

The form this boundary work takes depends on the terms of the specific credibility contest.

Journalism faces a crisis of authority. Interactive media eliminated journalists' monopoly control over news. They now work in a more crowded environment where readers and institutional actors can speak alongside them. Journalists have been forced to engage in boundary work to make claims for the superiority of what they produce in comparison to what amateurs, partisans and others are posting. For sporting institutions, journalism's loss of authority has a significant downside. Institutional actors relied on reporters as a means of managing their own image, using the press as a conduit for information they helped shape through the practice of public relations. In-house reporting suggests the answer to that problem is control.

In-house reporters build their professional identity around the idea of authority. They emphasize the factual nature of their reporting, using their in-house status to claim better access to the truth. Seeking truth is a key journalism ethic, and this orientation allows in-house reporters to align their professional identity with this norm. This also allows in-house reporters to engage in the boundary work of expulsion, defining their own practices as more ethical than those of the independent reporters and bloggers who may be more prone to speculation and willing to public less firm information if it means more clicks.

The facts are the facts

In-house reporters say their job is to produce factual reports about the team they cover, one which reflects situations as they are rather than as the team would prefer them to be. Faced with a negative story, an in-house reporter may frame a report less aggressively than an

independent reporter. But, as one writer said, that “does not change what the information is going to be. That’s what PR tries to do, they try to change the information.” In-house writers say this demonstrates their commitment to journalism’s values and ethics. For those who have left newspapers, it becomes another way they prove that little has changed, “The main thing is still get your facts straight,” one writer said. Or as another put it, “Accuracy still matters.” No journalist anywhere would disagree with those sentiments.

In-house reporters acknowledge that these factual accounts may lack some of the attitude of independent news. Rather, in-house writers say they provide useful information about the team. One writer described his work as:

Journalism with a clear mandate. If you’re at (an independent newspaper), and I can say this, your mandate is get it first and sell the newspaper. It’s funny, if you ride (public transportation, his old newspaper) has a massive campaign. One is “headlines that make headlines.” That’s fantastic. My journalistic role is to keep anyone who is interested in the (team) informed and a little more educated about how this is all happening. If someone wants to go to a source where the (team is) going to get hammered on a daily basis. I’m not going to be their source.

That mandate is to provide accurate information for an audience of fans. This reporter has no newspaper to sell because the team sells itself, which is a difference from his time in independent news. He does not need to provoke in order to chase clicks. This leads to a different tone. His work almost certainly will not include what might be thought of as a hot take (Rios, 2013). But this is a good thing. In-house reporters view the hot take as an ethical problem in sports media. The commitment to accuracy is an essential component of a journalistic identity, and in-house reporters claim that strongly as they define their professional lives.

A writer for a college athletic department described himself as a “professional journalist who writes with messaging objectives in mind,” by which he meant, “The way I write and report is still journalism. But I do it from a messaging point of view,” the writer said. He defined those

messaging objectives as knowing why the university athletic department wants to provide information to its fans and donors. Writing for a narrower audience forces him to care about different issues than he might at another outlet. His game stories stopped mentioning players on opposing teams because he knows his audience cares less about them than a newspaper audience would. He did not expect any fans of the opposing schools to be reading him now. He also knows he has to balance those messaging objectives with the demands of an audience with strong opinions and many media choices.

As another writer for a college athletic department put it, “I call it journalism. I report the facts and write the best I can, no different than before. I just happen to be writing for an audience that bleeds (team color). You can’t give them enough.” Perceptions of the audience shape the professional approach of an in-house reporter. But unlike in independent news, this audience is not constituted by citizenship but rather by commerce. Supporting a team is a financial relationship. In-house reporting may help sporting organizations better fulfill those commercial functions.

Writing for a parochial audience is not, however, a major diversion from independent news reporting. The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel covers the Green Bay Packers on a daily basis, but not the Chicago Bears. The Chicago Tribune does the opposite (Schudson, 2001, p. 164). The newspapers agree on the news value of football, but the resources they deploy are rooted in audience considerations. There are no formal limits on what the Journal-Sentinel may say about the Bears, but those choices will be justified by news value to a Wisconsin-based readership. Producing accurate content for a narrowly defined audience aligns with standard definitions of sports journalism.

In-house reporters emphasize facts, although they acknowledge they sometimes look for different facts than independent reporters might. While certain types of breaking news are out-of-bounds (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5), in-house reporters say they search for fresh information much the way independent reporters do. “I’m out there looking for information, digging around for stuff,” one writer said. “I’m not asking the easy questions or the questions they want to hear.” Another said in-house reporters have to be good at finding things out on their own, because they receive little help from the public relations staff, “We definitely have to fight and scratch for everything we get.”

This boundary work emphasizes the practical similarities in newsgathering between in-house and independent reporters. Both use some of the same methods to uncover news, even if they disagree about what counts as newsworthy.

I do like to think of myself as a journalist because I do dig up stories. They’re not the negative stories, they’re not behind the scenes on the team’s day-to-day, but they are stories about the guys, where they came from, what they’re up to, how they’re viewing the game now. ... I’m still doing stories and getting the facts, but I’m not Woodward and Bernstein, and that’s OK.

Factual stories need not always be negative, this reporter said. A player’s charity work or unusual hobby is also factual reporting, although it is more likely to reflect well on the team and its players. Digging for facts is not the same as muckraking.

Others echoed that sentiment. One mlb.com writer said while the site has always been “just like journalism,” he believed good news is worth reporting.

I’m not really the really negative type guy, the muckraker who’s going to come in and just do some huge takedown of an organization. It’s not so much my personality anyways, so I’m a bit more of an optimistic person, I guess you could say in that sense. But it’s definitely journalism. The day-to-day beat coverage of mlb.com is just like anyone else. I take a lot of pride in my work.

Or as a writer for a team site put it, “I think if I was a (newspaper reporter), I wouldn’t be the type of journalist that was going after negative stories, I’d want to do more positive stories, uplifting stories, but that’s just kind of my personality a little bit.”

Uplifting human interest stories have a place in journalism. Independent reporters write these stories when they deem them newsworthy. Feature work may bring more professional prestige than day-to-day beat reporting, and the tone of those stories varies considerably. Yet in-house reporters also verbalize a critique of independent journalism’s tone and interest in the negative. They view independent reporting as overly interested in what is going wrong rather than right. As they attempt to locate themselves within the journalism, they also seek to shift the norms of the profession away from types of news they likely would not want to report. That definition of journalism would carry significant benefits for teams, who would want independent sports reporters to focus more on positive stories. The definition of journalism they articulate here would lead to a less adversarial relationship between sporting organizations and the media. That would raise questions about the nature of the journalism being practiced.

An emphasis on facts aligns in-house reporting with the journalism ethic of seeking truth. This helps these professionals construct a journalistic identity, which they seek in order to establish themselves as authoritative sources. This boundary work seeks to carve out a jurisdiction for in-house reporters alongside journalists. Self-government may not be at stake as it is in other forms of journalism, but certainly sports reporting speaks to community identity and shared values. The nature of these ethical stances are important when thinking about how in-house reporting shapes the definition of journalism more broadly. Specifically, the authority in-house reporters seek to construct would potentially impose greater institutional control over

information. While this may help journalists tend to their jurisdiction, it also cedes power to established actors.

[A factual account of the agony of defeat](#)

This emphasis on facts organizes many other practices. A final score is a fact, and sometimes not one a team is proud of. Yet it falls to the in-house writer to address both good and bad news. “How do you cover a 35-point loss?” asked a writer for a college athletic department, grappling with a common question. “No school wants to see that it was dreadful and obliterated (on its own website), but you want to strike a balance so you don’t lose your credibility.” The preferences of the audience diverge from the organization in these cases. Most in-house reporters agreed fans after a loss were a highly critical audience and did not care for sugarcoating

The team lost and you try to put a somewhat positive spin on it and the next thing you know, you have 20 fans just killing you ... There is immediate reaction when you try to sneak one by the goalie. The (team) will put up a total stinker, and you’ll be like four guys in double figures, right away Twitter blows up with “You suck, (name). You’re sugarcoating, you’re a shill.” That’s what they do, you’ve got to deal with it.

Saying a team played well when it played terribly is public relations – spin, not fact. For people identifying as journalists, attempting to change facts would defeat the purpose of engaging in boundary work.

Yet truth does not always require elaboration. A game report about a bad performance will contain facts, not analysis.

If the (team gets) dominated like they did in (in a specific game), I’m going to play it straight. I’m going to tell what the facts are. If (an opposing player) runs for a touchdown, he ran for a touchdown. I probably won’t have much content that says, look how good the (the team) played, because they obviously didn’t play that well. ... When something bad happens and it’s (on the field), you play it straight. You don’t try to lie to them, and you don’t try to sugarcoat it. The thing I don’t want to do is be some kind of propaganda artist, I don’t think anyone in the organization would feel good about that.

Or as another writer put it, “You have to be honest, but you don’t have to be snide ... If someone played a shitty game, you have to say they played a shitty game, but you don’t have to use lots of analogies.”

An in-house writer can instead use statistics, which count as facts. “If a ballplayer is 0-for-50 (no base hits in 50 straight at-bats), I don’t have to say that he’s awful,” said an mlb.com writer. “I think if you just say he’s 0-for-50, you kind of know he’s awful. ... I’m not a columnist. It’s not my opinion.” In-house reporters treat statistics as objective performance measures, factual accounts of what happened in a game or a season.

If a player’s having an awful year, like I mentioned earlier, you don’t write this player’s an absolute disgrace they couldn’t beat the Little Sisters of the Poor. But you can write, this player has the lowest slugging percentage of any rightfielder in baseball and no one has struck out more than him, and he’s committed a league-high X amount of errors. ... You can write that story, if you bring the stats. If you do it that way, you never really hear a complaint because you’re not taking a cheapshot at anybody.

Athletes, most say, develop a thick skin when it comes to criticism of their performances.

Numbers have no hidden agendas, whereas personal criticism might.

The beat writer role in-house reporters said in Chapter 3 they were filling limits the amount of criticism they would provide anyway. Their boundary work connects them to the work of objective sports journalists rather than the more opinionated ones. Recounting facts does not entail holding anyone accountable for decisions or performances the way newspaper columnists might. This performance of truth-seeking shies away from holistic judgements of team or player performance. Even in defeats, small statistics can be mobilized to find bright spots. One writer said there usually is something on the stat sheet he can find to go beyond “how bad the team is on certain nights.” Some would call this spin, of course. But pointing that a young player posted good statistics after a game was out of hand is a piece of information fans would want to read. Data usage is a core sports journalistic practice, one which helped create the

profession and defined its ethical approach to truth. For in-house reporters, numbers cannot be spun. Using them are a means of engaging in the boundary work of expansion. They are telling the truth.

Another strategy in-house reporters use is being critical retrospectively. When a player breaks out of a slump or demonstrates statistical improvement, the positive news refers to the negative.

One might be the <Star player's> free throw shooting. He really struggled early in the year, but he's really turned that around. So we'll like make mention of, we don't pretend <star> never had a problem with the free throw shooting, but we won't write the "Is <star>'s free throw shooting a problem?" article. But once he has three good games, once he goes 12-for-13 over a three- or four-game stretch, we'll write <star> is looking to improve his game, and we'll talk about the struggles he's had his whole career. I guess it sounds homerish as I explain it aloud.

But this also is not drastically different than what an independent reporter might produce. A newspaper beat writer might talk more about shooting challenges as they were ongoing. But the change during a long season also would be newsworthy. This is an example of addressing the negative in a softer way, which in-house reporters view as an expression of journalism. They are telling the truth, and therefore living up to their ethical responsibilities, although doing so in a way that will be more palatable within the organization.

In-house reporters therefore treat facts and frames as highly distinct, in essence trying to recreate the separation of news and values journalists often articulate (Schudson, 2001). They believe they present information without bias, and generally avoid introducing their own direct interpretations. In-house reporters leave analysis to the experts, in this case, coaches and players.

If a guy pitches and gives up 10 runs in a third of an inning, gets pulled from the game in the first inning, you're probably not going to say he had a completely wretched performance. You're going to say, he had what he called the "worst performance of his career" or he had the worst performance by a (team) pitcher since 1976 or something like that. You're going to have more factual information in there. You're not going to read about that particular player being an embarrassment. You're going to read about that

pitcher putting up career-worst numbers and pitching poorly and him being disgusted with himself in his words not mine. So again, the information is still there.

This hypothetical factual account uses statistics to capture the scope of the poor performance and then the player's words to assess it. All of those count as factual reporting. By taking this all down accurately, the in-house reporter remains a down-the-middle source of information, the objective journalist. Others echoed that account.

When (the team loses) lose by a sizable margin, we do not try to portray it as if it was anything other than that. When the coach comes in and says, "They didn't play well enough to win and they didn't deserve to and made critical mistakes," we use his voice to pretty much say that. We'll quote him and talk about how the (team) fell short and where the shortcomings were. We do our best to tell it how it is.

And that extends to even harsh assessments.

There was a game where one of our guys threw an errant pass, it was going to be a backcourt violation and one of our guys, (player), took like two steps toward it and one of the (opponents) ran it down and forced one of our guys to foul. A big play in the game, really epitomized that our guys didn't come to play that day. (The head coach) was asked what do you say to him, and said, "I told him that was just lazy." Wow. That's harsh. So now I'm weighing in my head, calling out one of your players is not good for the brand, but it happened. It was a big play in the game. And he said it on national television, anyone who gets the (team's broadcast) saw it and heard it. When they put the quote sheets out, it was on it. So all those signals said to me, hey, this is quote-unquote fair game. I know the (newspapers) made it the lead for their stories. And I get it, I really do, that's going to sell papers. I put it ... at the bottom of my story.

Putting opinions in the mouths of experts has a long history in journalism (Tuchman, 1978).

Journalists quote experts as a means of establishing authority for their work, bringing in learned voices to explain a phenomenon in an unbiased way. This is a strategy for credibility. For the in-house reporter, it serves multiple purposes. First it reinforces that in-house writers are not on the list of people who speak for the team. It also builds the team brand to establish the coach and players and expert analysts. Only when an interpretation emerges with tacit approval from another part of the organization does it become reportable for the in-house reporter. An independent columnist might make that judgment on his own. In-house reporting recognizes a

specific structure of expertise, and is unlikely to challenge it.

This is important because handling negativity speaks directly to the in-house reporter's claim to authority. If fans cannot get worthwhile information from the team site, they have no reason to read it. For in-house reporters seeking to expand their jurisdiction, every loss represents a credibility contest. Even those few interviewees who do not call themselves journalists believe they must be seen as honest brokers by the readers. That means telling the truth, even when it hurts.

[Factual journalism is polite journalism](#)

That truth can be rendered in civil ways, something in-house reporters discuss quite regularly. They say they work hard at striking the proper tone in their stories, one that allows them to report credibly without alienating the people they work with. "There's a way to word it so that it's not so hard," one writer said. "And there are ways to word it to make it look not so rosy when it's positive. ... I don't want to use harsh words." In-house reporters pick their words carefully to produce what they view as a more journalistic tone. Meanwhile that discourse about tone allows in-house reporters to engage in the boundary work of expulsion, arguing for the superiority of their own approach against what they view as coarseness in sports media.

In-house writers articulate a preference for less personal commentary. Following from using objective measures for assessing player performance, they say they have an ethical duty to raise the tone of the sporting discourse, providing only well-considered and respectful criticism. This sets them apart from those who would issue personal attacks. One writer said this was identical to his approach when was in newspapers.

I was never the type to be super critical or rip (individuals) in stories. Most of the stuff I do, I stick to football. Some of the personal things, When I was at the (newspaper) I was never one to have personal attacks whether on (ownership), (the general manager), (team team president), whoever it was. Whatever was the subject of the day, it was always about football for me. ... There are analytical things that you can use to back up an

argument. It doesn't have to be personal attacks has always been my view.

Or as another writer put it:

If you're looking for that highly critical column blasting ownership of a particular team, you're not going to find it at mlb.com. But you can find that story discussing the moves by that particular organization that have failed, and here's why that team is in last place, or here's why these last couple trades haven't worked out and here's what the general manager has to say about it. ... But so-and-so must be fired today, not tomorrow, that's not going to be there.

In fact, mlb.com bans the word "fired" in its house style, meaning a manager may be dismissed or relieved of his duties. This slightly more gentle language makes a negative event seem less aggressive, one mlb.com writer said. As another writer said, "When the opportunities present themselves, it's my job to give it to them straight. Every story is not going to praise everything, but we're not sports talk radio."

Tone presents opportunities for in-house reporters to engage in the boundary work of expulsion. Gratuitous or vicious criticism of players is dismissed as the province of the less ethically minded, like sports talk radio. In-house reporters construct themselves in opposition to corners of the press they say fail to uphold standards of civility. This critique of independent media allows in-house reporters to define their approach as more ethical. When criticism is necessary, in-house reporters say they provide it, but it is possible to tell the truth without being rude. Negative information may be framed gently or presented as pieces of evidence rather than a fully completed argument. For the attentive fan, however, the information will be there.

This sounds very much like Fox News' slogan of "We Report, You Decide," which attempts to construct the work of a partisan outlet as value-free reporting. That slogan is boundary work, a take on classic notions of journalistic objectivity. In news, facts-only reporting without proper context often obscures as much as it illuminates (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003). Does it do the same in sports? A baseball game offers clear results so interpretation matters less.

The factual reporting from inside the locker room or deep dives into statistics are things that fans may not be able to do themselves, whereas interpreting games from television broadcasts is more accessible. Fans develop opinions about their teams that are a mix of what they are seeing, their own values and what the media reports. In-house reporters build their professional identity around access to inside information rather than general interpretation of on-field events. Being able to go deeper represents their claim to authority, matching the one independent media employ.

Off-the-field facts

Statistics can describe on-field issues, but sports teams often are implicated in stories that go beyond the games. These include legal troubles, sensational stories about players' personal lives or even the intrusion of politics into sports (Chapter 5 will cover this in detail). Many said it was the responsibility of in-house media to cover off-field controversies in some way, if only because they eventually would affect the team's competitive fortunes. If the league suspends a player, for instance, that missed time will affect the on-field story.

One writer's team lost a key player for nearly an entire season after a criminal conviction. The in-house reporters covered this story from the team's perspective.

We're not going to brush anything aside and pretend that it's not happening. There's a credibility obviously that we want to have with any reader or visitor to the website. ... What we do is follow the lead of the team president, the head coach, the general manager. The head coach and general manager had press conferences to address the issue. We wrote about those press conferences and what they had to say. And from there, that was the end of it from our end. When you're talking about the on-the-field effects, we have stories that quoted (coaches) and (players) about what (the key player's) absence meant to the on-the-field circumstance for (the team) ... All those sorts of things we talked about.

Ignoring the story would have damaged the credibility of the site and the reporters, whose coverage would have been obviously incomplete. The boundary work of expansion almost requires that this be covered in some ways. The in-house reporters did not, however, cover legal

proceedings. The local newspaper did that, with the in-house reporters taking up the story when team officials felt it necessary to respond. Here the in-house reporters covered the team's perspective, without fully engaging the outside world. They reported the facts from their beat, while staying away from information outside the team's influence.

Mlb.com has covered legal proceedings, including the tabloid divorce trial of Frank and Jamie McCourt when they owned the Los Angeles Dodgers (and by extension 3 percent of mlb.com).

We still had coverage almost every day of that trial, detailing what was going on. So it wasn't like we shying away from it. ... We don't go digging as much for the really negative stuff, but we try to be as traditional as we can compared to the newspapers. In some ways, obviously when you are owned by the league, you do run into some troubles here or there, but for the most part you try to stay independent.

For a site operating separately from the team, covering these sorts of stories becomes a way for the writers and the outlet to perform journalism.

Another mlb.com writer adopts a just-the-facts stance toward reporting on legal troubles.

I take a wire service approach to it. If a player's arrested, you have to write that so-and-so was arrested, here are the charges he faces. The (team) might issue a statement, they might not. You might just say that (team has) no comment on the matter. Usually when there's something extreme the team will issue some kind of statement about it. I'm trying to think of an example. Oh, (a player) was connected with two shooting incidents in the offseason (abroad). But he had nothing to do with that, he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time type thing. His agent spoke out and the (team) spoke out about it, so we had those comments, plus (he) himself posted something on his Instagram account. So you use those, a lot of times we'll use a player's Twitter if a player says something on Twitter. Again, I treat most of these like I do with a wire service type story, here's what happened and then go from there.

This again is expansion, demonstrating that in-house reporters report about sensitive issues that might reflect badly on the team or league brand. This approach to sourcing is virtually identical to what an independent reporter might include. At the same time, this report is concerned only

with facts. A newspaper columnist might take the opportunity to criticize the player's choice of friends or his decision to visit certain locations. Not an in-house writer:

I've never really wanted to be a columnist, so that element is out of it. For some people that's what they want to do, they want to inject their opinion, they might want to rip players or criticize them, but I wasn't trained that way, that's not my role. My role is to report what happens.

Baseball personnel also have criticized mlb.com's coverage of other off-field issues (MacCauley, 2005). Mlb.com's coverage of these issues reflects the boundary work of expansion; it covered news about the business of baseball and some of the key problems facing the sport. Being called out by other actors within the sport helps establish the journalistic bonafides of the site and its reporters. If they were in the public relations business, would they risk tarnishing the brand like that?

A writer at a team site said his outlet becomes part of the reporting frenzy when a big story breaks. He pointed to a recent player arrest as example.

Once it becomes news, its fair game and we're going to report on it, and we had all the facts that everybody else had. Which I think is important. But then I guess the tricky thing is, if it had been us who had gotten that maybe we wouldn't have been the first people to report on it. Because that crosses into territory where, again, you're speaking for the voice of the (team) and maybe you don't want to be the first person to put negative information out there I guess. Maybe that's the case if you're the only people who know about. But once it becomes news, once it becomes public knowledge, we're going to go with it same way someone else would. So it can be an interesting line to ride.

Not being first with that news defines a limit to the claims about the journalism being done at team sites. Some interviewees gave a journalistic reason for never being first on those sorts of stories, pointing out that their outlets would not have cops and courts reporters. For them addressing the story is evidence they are doing their duty as journalists. But the boundary work in-house writers engage in also invests the team site with additional authority. In-house reporters produce copy that centers the team's voice in these stories, giving those who read it a version of

negative information most likely to contain whatever damage control measures the team or league has put into place. Whatever else it accomplishes, in-house reporters' boundary work provides the team with a way to attempt to protect its brand.

Another reporter indirectly demonstrated this point. He said he pushed the team site to take a more journalistic approach because he believed that would give it more credibility with fans. That would make him and the team site more trusted when sensitive stories arose.

Our fans are consuming content from all over the place anyways. If we act like less of a mouthpiece for the team and more of a somewhat objective observer of the team, not only will it increase our views because people will actually come to hear what we have to say, but it will also give us some legitimacy when there is a negative story out there that isn't necessarily truthful. We can combat it by telling our side. And people, I think, are more likely to listen because they know on a certain level that we're not just towing the company line, blowing smoke, and acting as an arm of the public relations department. We've been doing that for a couple of years and it's worked great. The numbers are much better than they've been in the past. We're broken records. It's been good.

In this telling, being recognized as a journalistic organ provides legitimacy to the team site in all cases, including those when a public relations response would be expected. Combatting negative stories sounds like a desire to shape perceptions rather than report the truth – although putting accurate information into the public domain could be a goal of both journalism and public relations. But in this case, the credibility the reporter has sought to establish through boundary work also gives the team a stronger voice in a case with negative information. Having its in-house media taken seriously as a journalist offers significant benefits for the rest of the messaging operation.

Some limits on what negative information that could be reported include salacious stories without any real on-field connection. One mlb.com writer said those stories are left to other outlets.

I think it would be more like personal information. Somebody's going through a nasty divorce and it's in the paper, that's probably something we wouldn't pursue because it's

something we wouldn't pursue. ... Now if a story broke that team president was arrested for a DUI and in jail, I'm positive we would be able to write that story because we'd look like idiots if we didn't. But if you hear a rumor that guy's going through a divorce, and this might be why he's struggling on the field, I don't know if that's a story that we would write. That's not the type of thing that we'd normally do. I guess that's the 10 percent where we're a little different.

Both this writer and others drew a line at what they described as the "TMZ-stuff," referring to sensationalism and tabloid reporting. This statement doubles as the boundary work of expulsion, as in-house writers use the tabloid press as a foil. That reporter continued:

That's a place where people would say that you're not really legit, and if people feel that way they feel that way ... But if fans want to read that stuff when that story comes up they can go to the newspaper to read that. They can always come back to mlb.com and read about a trade.

This stand allows this writer to define normative boundaries in sports reporting. Trading web traffic to preserve reasonable privacy doubles as an expression of professional ethics. Stories that delve into players' personal lives may be salacious and unfair. Yet this ethical stance also means in-house sites would not be reporting news that might reflect badly on the people in the sport.

Some sites do not share this approach. Some writers at the team level were more likely to avoid negative stories. "Right now there's a story going around that a (player) fell asleep in a team meeting," one writer said. "Well, I know that's not true and I know what happened, but I'm not touching that. There's nothing in it for us." This in-house writer described putting the truth out about this story as a bad move. This reporter defined himself as a hybrid journalist, but defining a situation in which telling the truth is a bad move is difficult to square with that identity. The real story was negative enough that he and the team site allowed the false one to stand unchallenged.

Others said sensitive stories were best left for the public relations department. Asked how he writes about arrests, one writer said:

You know how I approach that? I leave it alone. If something negative happens that needs to be reported, the (independent) reporters will report that. Basically, I let the team handle that. If something negative happens, our philosophy would be, let's not pile on. In other words, again, I write in support of the news that happens and we're going to probably put out a release if someone gets arrested on the website. But there's no need for me to cover that. So, basically, if there's something negative, I leave it alone. They want me to leave it alone.

This writer, who viewed himself as a journalist, said he was adhering to team protocol. A writer who did not view himself as a journalist took a similar view, "My job is to be a (sports) reporter," that writer said. These writers articulated a view that some stories do not belong to them. Neither objected to this or viewed it as troubling to professional images or perceptions of their work by readers.

It may be that in-house reporters define their beats differently. All of them view news related to players and coaches and game as part of their responsibility, but they defined different limits on that. At the same time, many believe that someone can be a sports journalist without taking up issues with broader implications for society. The team site covers news from the team's perspective. At the same time, sticking to sports may also avoid situations where an in-house reporter might be enlisted in a communications plan. If covering funding for a new arena is beyond the beat, then an in-house reporter cannot be said to be doing strategic communication work for the arena. In their view, avoiding certain types of stories may preserve journalistic credibility. On the other hand, helping the team build visibility through coverage might serve as indirect support for an arena.

In-house reporters define their primary ethic as accuracy, an approach to news that focuses more on data than interpretation. A final score leaves no gray area. When interpretation is necessary, players and coaches provide it. In-house reporters argue the data they report reflects news values rather than specific messaging goals. From a journalism ethics perspective, accurate

reporting is tied to independence. Through freedom from faction and interest, the journalist is in a position to see the world objectively and report on it honestly. Can an in-house reporter, who draws a paycheck from the team, achieve that sort of independence?

Can you be independent in-house?

Chapter 3 described the ways in-house reporters attempt to build autonomy for themselves within a team organizational structure. These reporters use the organizational chart and various work routines to emphasize their uniqueness within their workplaces. The strict demarcation between themselves and the public relations department underpins this. Interviewees said the work they post reflects their own reporting rather than a team's official position. These reflect some of the ways in-house reporters engage in boundary work internally to establish their own independence within the team. This section digs further into how in-house writers articulate this definition and then attempt to communicate this status to the public.

Independence in this conception is a fundamentally personal trait, one that writers bring with them to these jobs. This means it is not, then, an institutional trait. As some in-house reporters pointed out, drawing a paycheck from a newspaper does not prevent independent writers from playing favorites or parroting the team's position on issues. The vast majority of the in-house writers interviewed said they exert significant amounts of control over their work, satisfying their own journalistic sensibilities. But the purpose of independence is to produce information audiences understand as credible. In-house reporters' work routines must demonstrate that they are speaking for themselves, they say. This draws on the performative boundary work described by Revers (2014) and extends it to interaction with the public. Most in-house writers understand their audience as sophisticated sports fans and exacting readers. To become a credible source of information, in-house writers must be able to speak about events in a way those fans would recognize. They believe interactivity, a feature of online media, helps

them establish this professional independence. This is the boundary work of expansion at work, expanding the definition of this core ethic to include themselves.

Operational independence

Mlb.com

Unlike writers at team sites, reporters for baseball team websites are not direct employees of the teams they cover. They point to this employment arrangement as a guarantor of their own independence. One writer put it this way:

I have absolutely no restrictions. That was one of the things I definitely wanted to make sure about before I became full time, was that we would have the freedom to report and write what we see and what we believe. ... I've never had anyone tell me not to write a story, or to shape a story a certain way. I've always had the freedom to write and report the way I think it should be done.

Others echoed this sentiment, "It works the same as the regular beat writer's job," one in-house reporter said. "Sometimes we'll write different things or assignments will vary, but for the most part the beat writer's job is virtually the same no matter what outlet you're at." Its employees view *mlb.com* as more or less a newspaper job, with those beat writers serving as the template for what independent sports journalism looks like. In-house reporters engage in the boundary work of expansion by emphasizing similarities with them.

That said, there are some qualifications to that independence. One reporter said writers produced stories in support of the league's sponsorship initiatives, like those related to cancer charities. "When MLB breaks out the pink bats for Mother's Day, and for prostate cancer awareness for Fathers' Day, we have stories, we'll speak to the players' mothers and fathers and write in-depth stuff about that," one writer said. A Father's Day themed feature would not be out of place in an independent outlet, but the direct connection between a story and a league initiative would raise ethical questions among many journalists. *Mlb.com* also produces sponsored content periodically, which is distinct from the normal reporting.

Mlb.com will have a sponsored story or a sponsored series of stories, so we'll be asked to contribute to that because we have a sponsor for that. Obviously you're working at newspaper you're not going to have a bank or a beer company say hey, we want to do a series of stories, can you crank out 20 stories that say Budweiser presents? ... At mlb.com, you do have that.

For those inclined to view mlb.com uncharitably, this might look like native advertisers selling their own native advertising. Yet sponsored content is an increasingly common, if controversial, practice in journalism. If outlets like the New York Times use it (Sebastian, 2014), then it becomes hard to claim its presence disqualifies mlb.com's reporters from the profession.

Mlb.com writers said they felt free to report any information about the baseball team, including stories that reflected poorly on the club they cover. Yet they do understand that some sensitivities exist, "Obviously when you are owned by the league, you do run into some troubles here or there, but for the most part you try to stay independent," one writer said. A few writers pointed to situations where they received pushback from editors due to sensitivities. One writer described a story about a player he produced that referred to a retired player who had been suspected of using performance enhancing drugs during his career almost being spiked because of that section.

There have been times when our editors, one of us will find out something that's a little bit too sensitive, even though we're supposed to be independent from the clubs, that might be a little sensitive so we have to hold onto it or sit on it. It has happened in the past. Yesterday, a story I wrote, which was pretty innocuous I thought, almost didn't get posted because it mentioned (the retired player) and his performance enhancing drug ties, and they got nervous over one or two sentences I had about that. ... I parenthetically mentioned (the player) has not done well in the Hall of Fame balloting, the baseball hall of fame balloting, largely because of his ties, real or otherwise, to PEDs, and the higher-ups in the New York freaked out and said, what do we do with this? So they made me rewrite the story. ... That stuff happens every once in a while, fortunately it doesn't happen all the time.

He insisted that this was the exception rather than the rule, "I can count on one hand, probably, the number times I've been censored in my X number of years with mlb.com. I'll take that ratio."

But he then posed the question of the self-censorship, wondering if knowing what his bosses wanted influenced him subconsciously.

Maybe there are times where I reign myself in, I can't give you specific examples. I wouldn't say I have total autonomy, but for the most part, I'm able to write what I want to write. I don't feel like I'm a club toady or whatever, or boy, at all. The fact is, they don't feed me anything they may not give somebody else. I'm on equal footing with the quote-unquote regular beat writers.

Other writers said they knew stories mentioning ownership received extra scrutiny as well. Those stories implicate some of the shareholders. Would a newspaper journalist be careful reporting on the arrest of his publication's part-owner? Perhaps. Yet the in-house nature of mlb.com does lead to a different set of questions. The limits on independence described here represent the league's own sensitivities. The widespread use of performance enhancing drugs represented a major scandal that tarnished baseball's reputation. Addressing that lax oversight is now a league priority. In-house writers said they were encouraged to break stories about suspensions for PED use, but the mention of former players who went unpunished raised red flags, at least in this one case.

On the other hand, he did feel he could write that story. He had the independence to report it even if the editors decided not to take the story in its initial form. This may be part of what journalistic independence looks like at a team site. This writer did, however, raise questions about how his bosses shape his choices. Research in newsrooms finds that demands often are not made explicitly, but rather shaped through organizational interactions (Turow, 1994). Interviews may not be the ideal method to uncover that.

That said, a writer who pushes the boundaries too often might themselves out of a job.

I may not work for the <team>, but if the <team executives> were not happy with my work, I believe they would have the power to go to mlb.com and say that we need to make a change. I'd like to think that since I've been there this long, that wouldn't happen unless I screw up.

This would represent a significant challenge to independence. Team communications staff may not be putting their hands on copy as it travels from a writer's laptop to the team website. But their complaints about a reporter might be taken more seriously at mlb.com than at a newspaper, where conflict might be viewed as a badge of honor. If continued employment depends on not angering the team, it seems likely that would affect how you go about your job.

Overall, writers felt mlb.com's version of reportorial independence applied to the overwhelming majority of stories they produced. They felt insulated from pressures to do the team's bidding and sometimes even the perception that they were furthering the team's messaging objectives. Many said their bosses were "journalists," who judged them on fairness and readability above all else. These factors all led them to claim that they could be doing journalism despite being employed by a unit of the league.

At team sites

Some writers at team sites have a similar sense of autonomy because they work as independent contractors rather than team employees. Therefore, they operate at a remove from the team's corporate structure.

The (team has) really been hands off. The only questioning or criticism I get from them is that my stories are too long. They'll say, different executives with the team say, "Well I don't read that much it's too long." So my answer is, you don't have to read all of it. If I write it newspaper style, the most important stuff is up towards the top.

The team leadership does not level content-based criticism, but rather are more focused on the form his work takes, which is less important to this writer. The vulnerability that comes from a contingent working relationship is balanced by the claims an in-house reporter can make for his own journalistic credibility in the role. They do not view themselves as team employees, and their work must maintain a standard that would enable them to find another media job, should they suddenly find themselves in need of one.

This writer said team work actually provided him a level of independence he felt he never had in newspapers. Not only is he able to report on everything he wants, he has the freedom to do it in his voice.

Like most writers, I understand the concept of checks and balances. But I've always had this notion of, it's my story. I should say it my way. If it's wrong, correct it. What happened at newspapers is they're general interest publications. You might write a story and an editor might change a lede, you know, for style. We say, the style is not right or wrong, it's my style, and you put my name on it. Whatever it is, I'm responsible for it. Every writer has this discussion. Now I'm at a place where they have no interest in rewriting it. They're not journalists. It's great. I really finally got my voice, outside of books, you couldn't really have it in newspapers. You could have it more maybe in magazines. ... The great part for me personally is now, it's my voice, the way I see it and I can say it with my sense of humor or my literary take. Maybe it's not the best, maybe somebody else could write it better. It's me and I think people want to know that. They want to identify with you. They want to know who the writer is, good or bad. Not everybody likes me, they write and say "oh, we hate you." That's fine.

For this writer, operating outside of a journalism institution resulted in a more pure form of independence. He said he has the freedom to report and write without anyone else's interests clouding it. This doubles as expulsion in some ways, pointing out the ways independence at news organizations may be compromised. This freedom may be function of his age and reputation as well. He may have the stature to dictate terms in ways other writers may not.

Another experienced writer described a similar situation. Having spent decades building a reputation in his market, he said the athletic department that hired him does not spend a great deal of time focusing on his work. The stories he produces for game programs and print publications receive some added attention because more people have their hands on them. But his work for the internet site is his own, both in content and in style, "I basically have a free hand." To paraphrase Janis Joplin, for these writers freedom may just be another word for having little to lose. Both said in interviews they are working because they want to, not because they have to. This does the work of insulating them from whatever pressures others may want to

assert, which is what professionalism as an ideology does for its members.

Others define independence as editorial control. In practice, this means in-house writers or those within the digital media team decide what to write about on a daily basis.

In my position, I'm not independent in the sense that I work for the team. I need to keep the goals and objectives of the team in mind. But I am independent in the sense that no one tells me what to write or who to write about. An assistant coach never comes down the hall and says, "Hey, we've got a guy who's really getting ripped in the press and we could really use a positive story." ... My goal is not to tell a story that furthers someone's agenda, it's to tell a story that no one else is telling.

Another writer said he might consult with others in the digital media department about content, but never with the team public relations staff.

I know what the news of the day is. I have a feeling for what I want to write. And you always have to be open to things that happen in the locker room. A guy makes a comment that certainly changes some of your ideas about what you're going to write. But usually I come in and it's whatever I feel like writing I get to write. My deal is I control content on the website with my position.

In these formulations, independence flows from a writer's control over the work she produces.

They employ the boundary work of expansion by describing their decisions in terms of news judgment, an expression of professional judgment. Like independent journalists, events drive the choices they make. Moreover, all consultations would occur within media-focused departments. Again control of content rests with those who understand what news means.

Other writers described a slightly more open process. Story selection was a bit more collaborative to these interviewees, although the in-house writer served as final arbiter over what to pursue

I'm basically on my own. I think they may pitch an idea every now and then and I'll say fine. I think there were a couple of instances where they needed some story written and I said OK. But basically, I'm on my own. I decide what I'm going to do. I'll let them know if I'm going to write a feature for the official site. But I'd say 95 percent of the stuff I'm doing, I'm making the decision on what to do.

The independence is tempered by being a part of the team. He occasionally, but not often, does stories at the behest of other departments. Another described a similar process

It's mostly up to me. I mean, my day-to-day is mostly, I decide what I think the interesting storylines are, and I go out and report those. ... People will offer up suggestions to me about storylines, which I actually solicit sometimes because through the course of the season, you kind of run out of things to talk about from time to time. As far as what I'm going to write, it's pretty much left to just me. ... There's never been any time when it's like, "we need you to do this story because of whatever reason, so go and do it."

This general editorial control allows these writers to assert a journalistic identity as well, even when there are encroachments. Once again, picking the stories based on news value represents a straightforward claim of journalistic identity. This is the boundary work of expansion.

One writer said independence went beyond editorial control. This writer said he acted independently in a variety of ways, which were embedded in the many choices he made each day, "It sounds foolish if I compare this to raising a kid where you have to make a 100 decisions a day on the fly," he said. He pointed to his own critical commentary and noted he had "never heard one peep from marketing" about his tone.

Others, however, rejected the idea that editorial control was a true marker of independence. A writer who described himself as a journalist considered story generation as a collaborative process

I have a lot of freedom. I get input from the coaches, SIDs, academic staff, professors. I wrote a story about 10 players who went on an anthropological trip. I have a source who came to me who wanted to get that out. As a (reporter), I might have to dig that out. ... I also know what subjects are important to the department, 30 percent of the time, someone in the athletic department will say, I'd like to see a story on this.

That said, he did not believe that this added up to independence in any meaningful sense. He works for the athletic department, which gives them the ultimate control over the information. And while all writers might be affected by institutional issues his own conflicts go a little deeper.

“I don’t know if anyone is truly independent,” he said. “I don’t think I can define myself that way. If you’re being paid by your subjects, can you be independent?” The boundary work in this statement argues away some of the distinctions that constitute the journalism profession. In a conflict-rich environment, independence comes from an internal compass that is difficult to communicate, “I know the process is journalistic and the product I produce is journalism.” This echoes Wiik’s finding (2015) about the durability of journalistic identity in explaining way departures from professional norms. Organizational imperatives always have the potential to impinge on journalism, even at defined media companies. How can anyone relying on a paycheck from someone else actually be independent?

Another writer said that while he tended to define his own news agenda, this did not amount to independence in his role or content. In fact, this writer said he “definitely” was not independent, that he worked in a marketing role that was controlled internally. Another writer said independence should not be a consideration in his role, “There’s none now and there shouldn’t be,” he said. He expects that people will assume a conflict given this employment situation and that does not particularly bother him. What matters is that they view his work as worth their time.

The ways that in-house writers claim independence may reflect organizational imperatives rather than professional ideology. A person occupying a position within a team has to be allowed to do that job if only because extensive oversight creates work for others. “They trust me enough to put out game stories,” one writer said. “For other things we have a structure in place, but there’s not a lot I have to have approved. The one thing is injuries.” An in-house writer going too far on reporting injuries could have effects on the players, because players from opposing teams might try to target injured body parts.

In Chapter 3, the evolution of in-house positions appeared to make them more closely aligned with journalistic norms. That independence can be reversed. One writer described a situation in which a piece of content he produced went viral because blogs perceived it as insulting a former player. Something that started as a harmless piece of offseason content turned into an organizational crisis.

That I just published on my own as I had done for my previous nine years. That caused such a shitstorm that we incorporated a system where I got put in the corner. Now I have to go through everybody. For the most part they're great and let everything through, but every now and again, they'll kibosh something. Today with (a player), I asked what it was like going to a high school, (a famous author) went there and (a famous actor) and how great was it, he said, "It was dope." I put that in the article and they changed it. We're the team site, we're trying to make these guys look good. That had to be taken out.

The new process involves seven people seeing articles before they are posted. "It's not my favorite thing in the world," this writer said. Independence therefore can be curtailed, something that underscores team control over content and the employment relationship.

Yet in some ways being in a position to transgress does inject some freedom into the writer's routines. Just as in the slightly controversial mlb.com story described above, in-house reporters may reframe those issues as having the ability to go too far. They pursue the stories they want using the language they want, and non-journalists may spike them based on messaging considerations. One said the team gave him his own site that looks different from the team's homepage. His work all appears on that site and the team has the option of whether to promote it or not. "I'll write something and send it to the person who's managing the website that day and our social channels. And basically it's their decision about whether or not they want it," the writer said. Even as they are being reigned in, the reporters can claim independence in these exchanges. That they need to be limited in these cases suggests they are pushing beyond what institutional pressures necessarily allow. This is boundary work in the assertion of independence

on their part, even if it raises significant questions about the work that actually reaches the public. On the other hand, in-house reporters who push the boundaries too often likely will find themselves out of a job.

Journalistic professionalism governs individual behavior rather than organizational imperatives. The ways in-house reporters describe their relationship to the teams they work for reflects the boundary work of expansion, helping them carve out spaces that can be described as representing independence. The question remains, however, about the ways organizational checks constrain the in-house reporter. Some occurs subconsciously and therefore would be difficult to uncover through interview data. Others are more explicit and create challenges for those trying to assert a journalistic identity.

Performative boundary work

In-house reporters use the organizational resources at their disposal to construct a journalistic identity. They also assert their independence in the course of performing their jobs, communicating that in a series of interactions. Some occur simply in the way in-house reporters carry themselves, “I’ve really tried really hard to be independent here,” said a writer who moved from independent reporting. “I think the perception for me when I went to work for the (team) was that how I would do my job would change because I’m working for the organization. ... I’ve tried to stay independent and report the way I always have.” He said he still approaches asking questions and interacting with sources the same ways he did as an independent journalist.

Another said he configured his work routines to avoid being in the office as much so he would seem more like one of the independent reporters covering the club.

I used to work in the office, I had a desk. I was there 9 to 5 during the day and at night for games. I don’t do that anymore. I’m not included in a lot of team meetings and long-term planning that I used to be involved in. I am kept at arm’s distance for some things. A lot of the time, I am given the heads up about certain storylines that might be coming up, so for example, our general manager was recently handed a contract extension by the owner.

Previous years I would have known about that maybe a day before and I would have something prepared about it. This time I knew about it when the press release came out. I found out about it the same way everyone else found out about it. I treated it as reporting the story from there.

That also has changed the way he relates to people who work for the team, including the players.

It's really on me to make sure I'm not putting myself in situations where there might be something that forces my hand a bit when it comes to "well, should I report this or not?" That's really more on me. For example, from time to time, I have players that I have good relations with that want me to do things with them or go places or enter into relationships that would be more than just kind of journalist-player relationships. I don't tell them as much, but I decline those things because I don't want to put myself into that situation. While it's great to have those relationships, and I feel I have those relationships. I want those relationships to be used for work purposes. I don't want it to bleed over into other parts of my life.

In this way, the writer of his own volition rejects any benefits that could come from the extra access to the team – be they professional or personal.

Performing independence outwardly may even be reflected in such small things as clothing choices.

I went to (a league event) this past week and there were plenty of team writers there. I noticed that a lot of them were decked out in the gear of their team whether it's a windbreaker, whether it's a polo short, whether it's a sweat shirt. I didn't bring anything (team) related. I was dressed like an average slobby sportswriter. Which I thought was interesting, also I thought it was kind of nice. I have (team) stuff and I could absolutely wear it if I wanted to, but I choose not to and really nobody ever gives me a hard time about it, which I appreciate.

Independent reporters would not wear team gear and this reporter dresses to match them. In-house reporters perform boundary work by building in separation between themselves and the teams they work for. This also suggests boundary work going on between in-house outlets, as this reporter compared himself to other in-house staff, who did report while wearing team apparel.

Interactivity as independence

The larger performance of independence, however, is directed toward the audience. The boundary work inherent in the adoption of journalistic genres and articulation of professional norms represents these writers making claims for authority and credibility that readers will accept. Interaction with that audience represents another means of this, something audiences take into account when judging the credibility of a reporter (Jahng & Littau, 2015). As writers for online sites, almost all the in-house reporters interviewed said they spend a lot of time engaging with fans via social media. They believe these interactions build relationships between themselves and the readers, which makes readers more likely to give credence to their work. Those conversations may help build connections with fan communities, the primary audience.

It's great that a fan who's sitting home watching the game can tweet at me and seconds later, in the press box at (the stadium) he can ask me why x or y is happening, and I can respond and do that publically. It's almost like having a conversation with friends during a game. It just adds to the coverage. It humanizes it a little bit more. We're people in the press box, and I enjoy talking about baseball. That's why I chose this profession. The more people I can talk to about the game, and hopefully provide some kind of insight, or at least answer some questions, that's all great.

Many say that interactions provide a means of directly asserting their independence through transparency. One writer said that when he answered a question, he reminded the listener of his employer, "I'll give them an honest opinion, but I give them a caveat, 'Keep in mind that I'm employed by the team.' I try to keep it factual," he said. Each query and answer provides a way for the writer to drop into these conversations that he is expressing his own opinions rather than those of the team. Boundary work is contained in this statement, as the in-house writer tries to locate themselves in the sports media system for the person asking the question.

Others say interactive features like mailbags help them perform independence. One writer says he tries to take every question sent to him, meaning he answers on the team website questions he assumes the team would rather be ignored.

I've answered the question should (the head coach) get fired? What about (the quarterback)? I think I've taken on all the tough questions. ... I had a couple of guys this year kind of get their ears up a little bit this year when they had some tough games. But I think the key to the thing is, you address it and you address it without piling on. You have to address some things, but you've got to be smart, you can't pound it into the ground. You have to make sure you address and it has to be smart about it.

This writer went on to say that backing up opinions with facts is especially important in this work. Another writer said the in-house reporter often acts as a sounding board for frustrated fans.

Fans ask questions and we'll tell them what we think. We're not mouthpieces for the organization. Some people are always going to think we are anyway. People looking at what we do may not understand the jobs we do. They probably never will. But when the opportunities present themselves, it's my job to give it to them straight. Every story is not going to praise everything, but we're not sports talk radio. We do interact with the fans and give them a chance to sound off.

Within their interactions, writers engage in the boundary work of expansion and expulsion. They are trying to answer questions honestly as a journalist would. From the perspective of an in-house reporter, the willingness to answer especially pointed questions demonstrates independence. At the same time, in-house reporting continues to draw boundaries between themselves and less civil or ethical communicators. They are performing the journalism they ways they believe it ought to be practiced.

What do fans want?

In-house writers view their readers as highly engaged fans, people with strong opinions about the team who want honest coverage, not press releases. As one writer put it, "I look at it from this point of view, I'm in a new role and a new voice, so I have to prove to them that I'm worth their time." Constructing the audience this way supports their efforts to maintain a journalistic approach, keeping with the identity many bought with them into the role. Some said fans will call them out for not being tough enough on the team. One mlb.com writer put it this way:

The (team), my four years I've been on the beat, have all been really bad. My first year, I remember because it was my first year on the beat, I didn't want to ruffle any feathers maybe I sugarcoated a bit, but all of a sudden in the comments sections, I see that I'm trying cover it up on the (team) official site, "typical spoon-fed stuff." That kind of thing. ... I realized I need to be more professional about this. (If) they are playing bad, as they have been all four years I've covered them, you have to be more honest about it. I think I get feedback every now and again from fans that are angry at the team anyway that I'm a homer. But that's really rare nowadays. My first year I saw some of that in the comments. I realized that I didn't want that kind of I guess, stigma, you say, I do think for the most part, most fans know the difference and they know we're going to cover the team very similar in terms of the day to day stuff like the newspapers.

His experience tells him that fans are on the lookout for information that reeks too much of the company line when it comes to mlb.com posts. This writer also says that fans do not want a homer, the sort of media voice who openly roots for the home team, even when they are going to a team web site for news. In this way in-house reporters are defining the terms their credibility contest. In-house reporters to construct themselves as the sort of sources who can serve an exacting audience. It is necessary to be more like a journalist in order for the audience to grant you the authority to inform them about the team.

Another mlb.com writer pointed to a survey on the sports blog Deadspin asking fans to select the best baseball beat writers in each city (Koblin, 2014). The survey included the mlb.com writers, some of whom were rated highly.

It was very unscientific. But looking at the comments people left there, you can tell some people ... just rejected anything mlb.com writers told them, just reject it outright. It's mlb.com, forget it, it's not a factor. ... But there were a certain percentage of people who found us a legitimate newsgathering organization or what have you. So it's not 100 percent, but enough people trust us.

What this writer found most telling is that fans appeared to hold in-house writers to the same standards as independent reporters. In some cases these fans judged the mlb.com writer as best of the group. Fan response matters because they will get a vote in determining the outcome of this ongoing credibility contest. If fans are judging in-house reporters by the same standards as

independent journalists, they, at least on some level, are accepting the identity claims put forward by in-house reporters. And if fans are demanding a highly credible level of content from in-house reporters, then they require those reporters to be something more like journalists.

Does this give the readers too much credit though? Some in-house reporters say fans understand that they are engaged in serious reporting,

I'd say 99 percent of people recognize that I'm a separate entity from the (team) ... But (the team worries) that something I say will be interpreted as an official (team) statement. That's the tightrope that I walk that the (local newspaper) doesn't have to. Can I just give my opinion and have it be my opinion? I think the public is much smarter than the organization gives them credit for. Organizations just want to preserve the status quo and journalism can upset that."

Others wondered if those lines are clear. A veteran writer wondered thought many fans understood his role, but certainly not all.

I try to have to have my own voice. It's an interesting thing because after (many) years has my voice become the team's voice or is the team's voice my voice? That's an interesting question. I do try to explain what the team is thinking. I think I've got a pretty good idea of what the team is thinking. What I try to do is try to write both sides like it was in the paper. So when I write the side of the team, I think they feel like I'm being a house man, mouthpiece, PR babble. You can call it whatever you want, but that's what the team is thinking for a given decision, that's what I'm trying to tell you what the team is thinking. If that's PR babble then I don't know. If you're looking for a reason why they're sticking with (the quarterback), I'll give you the reasons. Is that PR or is that just telling you why they're doing it?

Newer writers felt similarly, "I don't know that people understand that it's not necessarily my job to be the team's voice," he said. "At the same time, I'm with marketing, it's kind of my job to promote the (team's) brand. ... That's not a traditional beat writer's function."

Others say they receive harsh reaction when fans perceive them as not being fully on the team's side. As one writer put it

I still get the same kind of complaints because I don't lean heavily in favor of the (team). (The writer gives an example of officiating call not going their way) I try to look at it objectively. If I think the call should have gone against the (team), I say it. I try to be

unbiased and call it like I see it. I know a lot of people don't believe it but I really try to do it.

This writer presents a different view of the fan audience, one who wants to see the team's position promoted rather than evaluated. But this reporter views the fan complaints as a sign he is doing his job correctly. This articulates a journalistic ethic of truth telling, no matter how upsetting it may be. This claim aligns with a journalistic identity.

Another wondered if it is possible to be too unbiased, saying he tried to strike a balance between being critical and also speaking to fans in a voice they will respond to.

A lot of our readers have the expectation that they are getting a (team) slanted perspective of things. You're reading the official website, we work for the team. It makes sense that you would think that. At the end of the day, as long as you're not being unreasonably biased, I really don't think there's anything wrong with that. I'm sure plenty of people prefer to get their news from a friendly source, rather than one that's always attacking their team. But, I just, that's not the way that I was trained. That's not anything that I've ever known. I'm not from (the city), I've never had any affiliation with the (team) ever. I think I hold myself a standard that I don't go for that. And without being obnoxious, I try to do my best to advertise that you're barking up the wrong tree if you want me to be a cheerleader. I don't want to be that. That's not what I was trained to do when I was getting into this and decided it was what I wanted to do. And I think for the most part, I'm very fair and most of my readers tell me that and would tell you that. But I kind of go out of my way to be less associated with that than other people might.

The writer described a situation in which he tweeted during a high-profile replay review predicting that the ruling was going to go against the team.

I tweeting from the sideline as soon as it happened, I don't think this is going to stand ... they're going to overturn it. ... I put that out there immediately when the review was still going on and I got absolutely crushed. I got absolutely destroyed by our readers because they didn't want to hear that.

Would readers have reacted this way to an independent reporter saying the same thing?

Potentially. Yet even the negative response was helpful for the writer in communicating the sort of reporter he wants people to view him as. This boundary work of expansion into a journalistic identity helps him communicate to the fans how he wants to be viewed.

At least one writer rejects the idea that he has anything to prove at all as an in-house writer. He said he feels his work speaks for itself.

You either respect what I write or you don't. I'm at a point where if you don't like it, you don't have to read it. I don't go out of my way to try and show people that hey, I'm not part of the PR department. I think you can tell that by reading my stuff. If you just blindly think that I'm a spokesperson for the team because I work for the team, then you don't read the stuff, and I honestly don't care what you think. It's just my personal thing. Don't make a judgment until you read the stuff. Anyone who reads (the site) and follows us on a daily basis will know that we're pretty independent. We write what we see and that's kind of my approach to this.

But even this assertion merely begs the question when it comes to independence. He simply asserts it as true.

In-house writers view the creation of these boundaries as a moving target in some ways. The production of independence is meant to underpin a journalism of facts. In-house writers feel they have the autonomy to report honestly. Whether audiences believe that is happening remains another question. Only one study has looked at the credibility of in-house outlets from the audience perspective, finding that independent outlets are significantly more credible, although the means showed the gap between the two was not wide (Mirer & Duncan, 2015). Audiences are reading in house reporters, they say, which suggests to in-house writers that the information they produce is sufficiently credible. They feel the boundary work they are engaging in has been sufficiently effective in enlisting the audience into granting them authority over sports news. That said, this boundary work also raises some question on both reporters' independence and the production of facts. The next section of the chapter addresses that issue.

[A journalism of officialdom](#)

The previous two sections in this chapter described the boundary work of expansion in-house reporters engage in as they work to align their professional identities with the journalism ethics of truth and independence. In-house reporters' emphasis on accuracy speaks to one of

journalism's core ethical claims, which is that journalists should seek the truth. Their articulation of norms of independence within team structures buttress claims of truth-seeking. Journalism's account of accuracy is linked to independence; freedom from faction or interest allows a journalist to produce true information. People who work for teams or leagues employ a variety of strategies to perform that independence to the public, in hopes that audiences will accept the information as credible. In-house writers' boundary work reflects an effort to establish authority for themselves professionally.

At the same time, boundary work is a strategic process that addresses itself to the key challenges facing a profession. For journalists and would-be journalists, this means addressing the loss of authority that has come from the loss of exclusive jurisdiction during the digital era. By constructing a professional identity around two uncontroversial ethics – accuracy and reportorial independence – in-house reporters make a claim for membership in the journalistic profession. In-house reporters engage in the boundary work of expulsion as well, pointing to the tone of independent media and what they have described above as rampant speculation as examples of negative practices that violate professional ethics and norms. What they seek to construct through these professional boundaries is a fully authoritative account, which they say has been lost during the digital era.

Yet in establishing their own authority, in-house reporters are really constructing the team as a standalone information network. They view the door of the team's practice facility as the outer reaches of their beat, meaning that virtually all the sourcing they use is connected to the team itself. These routines make their employers the final arbiters of what counts as truth and what is out-of-bounds. They are expanding the boundaries of the team brand into authoritative information production. In-house reporters' journalistic identity adherence to a version of the

profession's ethics creates the expectation of authoritative reporting. That gives the team greater power over information.

[A team-centric information system](#)

Interviewees at team-based sites said almost all the sources they use are connected to the teams they work for. Players, coaches, staff and team executives provide the information in-house reporters use to make sense of their teams. Occasionally a corporate partner or a person from a player's charitable foundation will be included, but that is rare. External sources might introduce information that could reflect badly on the team in some way. As one writer put it, the mission of the team site is to provide verified information for the fans. The team is the source of that verification.

I'd say the overwhelming majority of sources in our stories are going to be (team) players, (team) coaches. We're basically telling the story of the team and we'll use the players' voices and the coaches' voices in most cases to tell our stories. As you mentioned, there are community type deals where you try to get information about player and what he's involved in, definitely people with his foundation or people he's touched with his foundation or been affected by what he's done in the community will of course play a role in a story like that.

The most important category this excludes are player agents, who are the primary sources of breaking news for independent sports journalists. Agents often provide background on potential player movement, contract details and discontent. The same writer continued:

We do not really, I can't ever remember having an agent quoted in a story. That's not something we would use as a source. For us, it's all about the official nature of what we're writing about. With agents you get into a speculation and that's a different type of process that goes into that. So that's not really something we're involved with. ... The overall majority of our stories are based on player interviews and coach interviews.

Or as another writer described it, "We're allowed to and we're encouraged to (break news), but I think the odds are very very very good that it's going to be more from the team perspective than from a player perspective when we do those types of things." Agents represent the player perspective.

This puts the independence they seek to carve out in some perspective. They do have some operational freedom, but limits on external sourcing define the bounds the information universe. The range of sources in both cases are limited to those connected to the team. Though the writers provide different reasons for this, what they construct is an information network populated entirely by the team and its personnel. A writer can be as free as he wants to report anything if he has contrived never to come into contact with information he cannot report.

Some cast their limited interactions with agents as less about avoiding information than merely being a waste of time.

Because I really can't deal with player movement too much I stick right with the team and the coaching staff. Again, there are certain outlets for fans to get rumors and things like that, hear from players' agent about whether they're happy or unhappy, again we don't really disclose contract information on the website either, so there's that. And I don't mean to make it sound like it's so restricted. The (league) is a league of lawyers, so there are a ton of rules as far as what we can and can't cover. ... So again, I pretty much stick to the locker room and the coaching staff, I'll do the front office, our general manager and things like that. But I try to, as far as agents go, I have good relationships with them for general information, but it's not something I really do a ton of reporting on. It's just something that doesn't apply to our site really.

Another writer said he sought out agents and others for feature story ideas, especially during the offseason, but not so much for fresh information. The limitations on what information can appear on an in-house site leads to reporting routines that help predetermine some outcomes.

A former newspaper writer said his relationships with team sources were just much stronger than his connections with agents since moving in-house.

The more you're around somebody, the more you see somebody in the hallway every now again and see somebody down in the lunchroom you obviously become more comfortable with them. So it's just like any kind of source building. ... I would say my sources were better with the agents when I was at the (newspaper). Now that I'm with the team I don't have as good a sources within agents. Those are really the biggest line of sources for people outside the organization, so my sources have changed a little bit. But I have a good relationship with the front office. They realize what I do.

Agents also have less use for in-house media. An in-house reporter often will not post stories about discontent or information meant to command a larger contract on the free-agent market, which are the reasons agents work with reporters. Many feel – likely correctly – they can make more impact by speaking to independent reporters.

In-house reporters at team sites build source pools limited to the team itself. After performing boundary work to gain credibility and autonomy in their reporting roles, they accept key limits on it in terms of the information they gather. The authority in-house reporters work to cultivate is deployed on behalf of the team site. A reporter's professional control over information becomes the team's control over information.

Mlb.com writers experience fewer institutional limits on working with agents. Their editors expect them to break news and that means close contact with agents, "I'm working with everyone," one mlb.com writer said. Yet relationships with agents are often fraught said another writer. Information trades and other ethically murky actions occur at times.

Agents are a big one in the offseason especially, especially at the Winter Meetings. I put in a lot of calls to agents, even if it's just to confirm something here and there. I'm doing this on background, a lot of it is going in circles, and they call back. Some I know. Some are better than others. Some are great with the media, pick up right away. Some are more evasive. The hard thing is, I think there's some agents that really only deal with the national reporters, the guys that are the big time, the (John) Heymans or the (Ken) Rosenthals (both national baseball reporters) of the world. They don't want to deal with small-time reporters or mlb.com reporters. They'd rather break their info to the bigger guys who have more reach. ... As a beat reporter, I don't really play that game as much in terms of the trade-off in terms of pumping up this guy for that guy. I'm not trying to be a pawn or anything like that. But I am trying to develop relationships with some of the agents.

But it also is important to have good sourcing within the team.

I think the big thing in terms of developing sources, definitely sources and I think a lot beat reporters need is to develop a source within the front office, like an assistant general manager is always a good source. The general manager himself is usually a tough source because he's usually so busy, or at least he's not going to want to deal with that in terms of giving me news or confirming stuff. Usually the assistants are good about that. Usually

the PR staff is good where sometimes the (team signs a player) and you're trying to figure out if it's true and the PR staff might tell me, "It's not official yet, but it's not wrong, it's not official yet." Normally you can approach them and say, am I wrong in reporting that this is happening. That's one way you can do it is a question, am I wrong in reporting this? And they'll correct you on it, or if you're right, it's off the record or background.

Even for independent reporters, the team still often acts as the final confirmer of information.

This should not be read as criticism in this case. Getting a second source is always good practice, and a step independent reporters might not take if they had an agent confirmation. Mlb.com reporters do work outside the team to generate fresh stories. The extra step of caution is something they should be taking. But it is worth asking whether they would overrule an objection by the PR department to a story? No interviewees spoke to this question.

Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter discuss how in-house reporters define core journalism ethics in crafting their professional identity. Journalistic allegiance to facts aligns in-house work with the profession's core claim to societal value. The personal independence in-house reporters assert means to support those claims of accuracy. Those ethics are journalistically important because the profession addresses itself to the public's need to be self-governing. Less may be at stake in sports, although a public service mission is at the core of how sports journalists do their jobs. As one put it:

I think sports reporters in general do a really good job of getting the news out there, of holding organizations accountable. Let's remember organizations are now selling seat licenses in the addition to season tickets, parking, in addition to the access. Fans are being asked to do more to (show) their dedication to a team, then I think it's important that they know what's going on with that team. I think that's important.

If in-house reporters are providing that information, they believe they can serve that function.

This data suggests that in practice, in-house reporters conflate the terms accurate and official. Independent reporting allows outside voices to impose order and meaning on sports,

although this does not always happen. Tuchman (1978) described what she called a “web of facticity,” which was the series of societal relationships that allow certain institutions to define what is understood as true. In her account, this reproduces power by vesting the ability to define truth in a limited number of voices. For an in-house reporter this web is even smaller, if it can even be defined as a web at all. In-house reporters assert independence from the public relations department in their daily work, but it is only after PR announces something do those reporters deem it true. Does that meet an ethical standard? They also raise other ethical concerns about independent sports reporting, especially related to tone, which would have the effect of protecting team staff from overly negative comments. The professional identities in-house reporters attempt to carve out also may benefit their employers in ways that problematize those identities. Chapter 5 examines how these ethics work in action.

Chapter 5: Talking about practice: Boundary work and breaking news

The previous two chapters have captured the meta-journalistic discourse in-house reporters engage in as they work to define their place in the sports media system. Chapter 3 described how they locate themselves in the sports media network, defining themselves as journalists in part through articulating a set of relationships with other actors. Chapter 4 examined how they defined core journalism ethics – truth and independence – to reconcile their employment relationships with the professional identities they are cultivating through boundary work.

This chapter seeks to put those findings to work within the context of breaking news. The first half illustrates how reporters manage claims about their professional identity in moments when control over information is unclear. For the most part, in-house reporters do not break news as a matter of policy. They also tend to downplay the importance of the practice, as reflecting ethical problem within the profession. When coupled with the limits on independence described in Chapter 4, I argue that in-house reporters use boundary work to connect themselves to an era in which pre-digital era control over information has been restored. In arguing for their own place in journalism, they seek to return management of information to institutional actors.

The second half examines how in-house reporters covered the intrusion of social movements into sports when athletes participated in 2014's Black Lives Matter protests. This story caught in-house reporters between their role as team employees and the journalistic identity they work to create. These writers deployed that journalistic identity to explain their choices in covering that story, justifying a range of choices from producing full stories about acts of protest to ignoring them completely. At the same time, the choices in-house reporters made did not align with team communication goals in relation to the protests, suggesting they had successfully claimed some autonomy within their organizations when it comes to the content they produce.

Breaking news as a work practice

When it comes to reporting on a game, a press conference or even a player arrest, in-house reporters construct news out of the facts available to everyone. Statistics, quotations from group interview settings and press releases belong to everyone in a press room, no matter their affiliation. Breaking news represents the exclusive introduction of new facts into the sports media system. This is not a job practice for most in-house reporters, who are subject to a range of restrictions when it comes to reporting new factual information. In-house reporters either cannot compete for news about trades, signings and suspensions because league policies bar it or care less about doing so because they do not see breaking news as particularly important to establishing a jurisdiction. This is distinct from trying to be first with unique feature stories. Those are stories in-house reporters say their lack of space constraints and superior access allows them to produce. The nature of breaking news is that it removes control over information from the organization announcing it. The work of in-house reporters, meanwhile, appears to invite team control of information, no matter how these workers view themselves professionally.

Sports teams and leagues regularly announce news through press releases. When a coach is hired or fired, a new player is signed or a trade is completed, the public relations staff makes the formal announcement. The timing of those announcements is subject to league rules. A team employee who speaks about a player who is still under contract to another team would be guilty of tampering, a serious infraction that usually results in significant fines. Yet there are few instances in which the team press release is the first time the public learns of a trade. Most player transactions leak in advance of the formal announcement, often the result agents or others speaking to independent reporters. A group of national sports reporters describe themselves as working the “transaction beat” (Lowe, 2016). Their professional identity is tied to getting this

sort of information out first, ahead of the teams. Unlike in-house reporters, they are not governed by tampering rules.

That means speculation about player movement, long a staple of sports journalism (Fountain, 1993), is off limits to the in-house reporter. Even in-house reporters who try to publish all fan questions they receive for mailbag-style content have to leave certain queries unanswered, “When I get fan letters and they say, well can we trade for this guy? I have to basically ignore them because I can’t talk about a player on another team,” one writer said. “It’s just prohibited. There are limitations and restrictions, but you just have to work around it.” Fans commonly wonder about potential future acquisitions, but in-house reporting cannot speak to that discussion topic. An in-house reporter could write that a player had been traded from his own team, but would be unable to mention who was coming back until the league had formally approved the deal in a trade call.

What that often leads to is an in-house reporter watching a trade story languish in the content management system waiting to press publish as independent media post it first.

I have to basically wait until the deal goes through with the (league), like when the (team) acquired (a player) two years ago, the actual trade didn’t go through until like 3 o’clock, and all the information had already come out. I had written the story, had it done by noon. It was just sitting in draft mode on our web page. Those are some of the limitations.

Another writer said that not breaking news was the biggest adjustment he had to make after leaving independent media. “One of the hardest thing for me to adjust to on the new job was having to slow it down,” he said. “It’s not having it first, but having something extra, something more, something deeper. It’s not being the hare, it’s being a better tortoise.”

Conceding breaking news to independent reporter complicates the boundary work of expansion, in which in-house reporters seek to emphasize their professional similarities with beat writers. Competing for scoops is a common journalism practice, and retreating from that makes it

difficult for in-house reporters to say they are doing the same work. They respond by casting this restriction in journalistic and competitive terms, saying it simply forces them to have better information since it will be appearing later. In this way they are still seeking to beat the independent press in some way, reinforcing the competition they insist exists. This way they downplay what looks like a significant distinction between the two roles. At the same time, this practice further constructs the team or league as the arbiter of a piece of information's truthfulness. In a map of journalistic authority that centers institutional control of information, ceding competition on breaking news reinforces a connection between truth and officialdom.

Rules against breaking news are not uniform. Some teams give their in-house reporters the freedom to break news to the extent possible. One writer for a team site is formally an independent contractor and writes under a disclaimer attesting to his independence. "I'm free to break any news I would care to," the writer said. "The (team has) never told me what to do or what not to do. They trust because I've done this job before and they hired me because I did this job before that they know I understand the job."

The main pressure they feel when it comes to breaking news is fear of being wrong. A team's official website reporting incorrect information is going to cause problems for people beyond the in-house reporter.

It can be scary, I think scary is probably the right word. At a glance the casual reader or the casual Twitter user who's just perusing his timeline doesn't think of us as being our own autonomous voice. So you always have to be mindful of that. Something we put on our site, people are taking that to be the voice of the (team). You know, it puts a greater responsibility on the entire thing than I think a lot of other people have, so I think that's something that's always in the back of your mind.

Whatever independence in-house reporters feel they have, mistakes made on the team site will be treated as official news because of where they appear (independent reporters interested in engaging in the boundary work of exclusion would likely want to collapse those distinctions).

Accuracy remains a marker of journalistic authority, which derives from journalism's ethical canon.

Another writer said that when he uncovers new information, he works his sources just like a newspaper writer would. "I'm not vetted through the team," he said. "I have sources within the team. If I have breaking news or anything like that I'll vet it through certain sources, to make sure I'm correct. Because of my affiliation with the team, I can't get it wrong." This writer frames his relationships to team he works for as journalist-source. When he seeks confirmation, he is vetting information not asking for permission. Describing interdepartmental communication as reporting contact defines those interactions in a journalistic way. This doubles as an expression of the autonomy within the organization; his co-workers are his sources. In-house reporters also do this when referring to the team not having any comment on a developing story as well. This asserts that a team posting information on its own website is not commenting on it, which could seem like a strange distinction to those unclear with practices at in-house sites. Yet these expressions of independence obscure the role the team plays in determining what can be reported.

Writers at mlb.com often work through the team on breaking information as well, even if they are not governed by tampering rules. Posting information on the team site imposes a level of discipline on them, they say.

For example, I got confirmation that (name redacted) was going to be the manager. It had been rumored for a while and then I got confirmation from a very good source and then told my editor. What we wrote was, we didn't say that he had the job, but that major league sources said. You have to remember that if there's something on the (team) site, people will assume the (team is) responsible for that information, that that's correct. If I'm writing that (someone else) is named the (team's) manager when we all know it's going to be someone else, I can't be doing that. Because then the (team's) media relations people are the ones who are going to be getting the phone calls saying, well I read this on your website, that (someone else) is going to be the manager. ... My biggest emphasis is on getting it right.

One part of the team acts as a primary source for information, but the means of getting that out to the public is partially enmeshed in the traditional divisions of labor in the sports media system. The team's own press release announcing the hire would appear on a different part of the website than the news story. Caution on breaking news is good ethical practice. But the importance of being correct is articulated here not as a professional norm, but rather a function of not wanting to create organizational problems for the team. An ethical approach to information can be detached from the principle behind it.

That was echoed across interviews with mlb.com staffers.

I think that when they see it on the (team) website, fans see it as gospel. If a newspaper writes it, they think it's probably true, but they don't know for sure. But if you see it on the (team) website, oh it's definitely true. I think fans may think, which is wrong, that the (team) put this on their website themselves, it's got to be true, which is obviously not true at all. I think in that sense, you've got to be right for sure. If a source is telling you something and they're wrong, it's definitely not a good thing, but at the same time, guys know and some people do see it as official. Again, I'm trying to figure out what the word would be, the official place to see if it's real or not. It's kind of nice, but I think sometime fans get confused and think that the (team) is the ones putting the information out there.

Here we see the boundary work of expulsion at play. As this mlb.com reporter sees it, fans would view independent media reports as likely true rather than absolutely true. He calls team-authored information more credible than independent news; the official announcement trumps any report, no matter how well-sourced. On the in-house reporter's map of authority, the team, not the reporter, defines information as true, even if you do not work for the team.

This complicates the boundary work in-house reporters engage in. They work hard to be seen as journalists, credible yet independent sources of information about the team. Yet the source of the authority comes from their relationship to the team. Describing independent news reporters as less credible than in-house ones would be an example of the boundary work of expulsion. In-house reporters claim they serve readers better because they only provide official

information. Yet despite the boundary work of expansion to be seen as journalists, the outcome is that the team exerts more control over information. The general ethos of the in-house reporter, is to not get too far out in front of a story. In-house reporters engage in boundary work to establish authority over information. But in the case of breaking news that authority creates a disincentive to pursue it.

In-house reporters say they adhere to stronger standards of accuracy than independent reporters because they wait for final confirmation before reporting a piece of information. This leaves out plenty of stories that are true, but would rarely be officially confirmed, such as a team almost firing a coach or almost making a trade. An independent reporter with multiple confirmations would run with those stories, even without an official announcement. Journalism ethics guide a member of the profession to seek truth and report it when it meets her standards. The in-house reporter does so when it meets the team's standards, which, are defined by league rules. Independence does not support to search truth in the in-house reporter's epistemology. Rather it estranges reporters from truth.

Some asked what breaking news actually means in the in-house context. Is the in-house reporter trying to beat his own PR department to posting information? One in-house reporter defined breaking news as getting a story posted before anyone else. Given that the team itself is often the initiator of the news, this should not be difficult. He said he has been first on contract signings in the past, both for free agents and on resigning players, something his bosses have encouraged.

Here we control the news. When we sign a guy, or cut a guy, or any of that stuff, besides the agent, we're one of the first people to know. We should be breaking news and we've gotten a lot better. (Major Player or Major Player) signing his contract, are some of the other things I've broken that are fairly big. The team values the importance of that to bring eyes in and it gives you credibility, breaking news. And then they'll stay for the great content you have on your site. You can't just have great content if you're always

lagging behind everyone else in terms of breaking news. You've got to do the breaking news and have great content and that's the goal that we have.

This writer argues that ceding breaking news diminishes an in-house writer's journalistic reputation and, by extension, the site as a whole. In-house writers claim a jurisdiction over news by reporting it, and stepping away from that weakens the foundation of their professional identity.

Others wonder if team control over information makes breaking news a less meaningful concept as it pertains to in-house reporting. The potential for pre-knowledge diminishes the achievement being first with a story might represent for an independent journalist. As one writer said, "A lot of times I find out things just because I work for the organization ... I don't feel like I'd be breaking news. It's not like I dug something up. I just happen to be here."

College athletic departments have more freedom to use their sites for posting news. One writer said internal discussions about how to release information are often extensive. The decision to give a story to the in-house reporter often involves strategic calculations based on maintaining working relationships with the local media.

They still need (the newspapers) to reach the fan base, so they can't completely tick them off. So we pick and choose what I break. There's more discussion than people realize about what I break and what I don't break.

In this case, a story broken by the in-house writer is merely one fed to him rather than to an external reporter or put out via press release.

A writer for another college athletic department said his school still tried to put out information through the conventional channels, which reach wider audiences than the team site. A feature he might do for a game program will be offered to a newspaper beat writer and appear around the same time. He knows it works differently at other schools.

There's a former newspaper guy at (another University), who I chatted with when they played here. When they extended the football coach, they gave him the story for their website and then had the press conference the next day. Here, they're not interested in doing that. They still think it's important to get the stories into the newspaper, and that's going to have as much impact, if not more impact, than putting it on their own website.

That difference in philosophy repositions the in-house website as another tactic to support a communications strategy. Being used this way contradicts the way in-house reporters position their work as essentially journalistic. One could say that many stories are broken thanks to strategic leaks of information, but in this case, leaking internally allows for greater control over information.

One mlb.com writer said he had developed a strong enough relationship with the team public relations staff that he will run potential scoops by them and ask to be stopped if he is off base.

The PR staff might tell me, "It's not official yet, but it's not wrong, it's not official yet," Normally you can approach them and say, am I wrong in reporting that this is happening. That's one way you can do it is a question, am I wrong in reporting this? And they'll correct you on it, or if you're right, it's off the record or background.

This writer said that being a beat writer means having sources in the public relations department as well as in the team's front office. It is unclear how much of this reporting and how much of this is the team exercising control over the work of mlb.com writers. Again, this writer referred to PR staff as sources. As an mlb.com reporter they do work for different companies.

Across sites, in-house reporters say they do work to "break features," compelling human-interest stories on which they have an advantage. This not the type of news that is traditionally "broken," but features were brought up regularly in response to questions about breaking news. "There is competition in terms of finding the really unique feature story and telling it before someone else tells it," one writer said. Or as another writer put it, "We want to have the most in-depth features." In-house reporters believe being part of the organization allows them to produce

better feature content because they have a greater trust level with their sources. Players and team employees know there are angles in-house reporters simply will not pursue. The result is less critical content, but more engaging stories, “We’re not breaking stories, we’re not writing exposes,” one writer for a college athletic department said. “We’re covering the athletes and coaches who perform here. ... We’re covering it from better angles. You’re getting a better presentation, and so does the school, of what’s going on and why.”

The journalism of facts proposed by in-house reporters is more about repackaging what is in the public domain already. League rules and organizational norms prevent in-house reporters from reporting closely on player movement or other types of information teams may not want released into the public domain. Chapter 4 concluded with a discussion of in-house reporters’ team-based epistemology. Even at a site like mlb.com, which goes to great lengths to claim independence and does encourage its reporters to break news, these factors still operate, although clearly to a lesser degree.

This stance toward breaking news complicates the professional identities in-house reporters are using boundary work to build. We have seen throughout this project the ways they seek to expand the definition of journalism in order to include themselves. They use their professional identities to claim standing in order to offer definitions of journalism and key professional ethics. They also use expulsion to claim they produce a more rigorous ethical journalism based on their definitions of facts and truth. But this boundary work seeks to reconstruct the pre-digital relationships within the sports media system. It argues for the authority of official sources and the centrality of access in sports reporting.

The sports media landscape of 2016 encompasses a range of new voices, some of whom, like fan voices and bloggers make claims to authority independent of their connections to

sporting institutions. The journalistic boundaries of the pre-digital sports media system created simpler information flows that imposed some order over the system. In-house reporters treat the team and its players as sources of truth. Asserting that through the lens of journalism makes an argument for more team control, a claim that likely would benefit all those who work in a mediation role, both in-house and independent.

Boundaries and breaking news

Perhaps because their positions generally orient them away from being first with information, in-house reporters stress being current as more important than breaking news. The routines of sports media have changed with the rise of digital media. Most sports news is broken on Twitter, which has turned the scoop from a day-long embarrassment – a reporter had to wait until 24 hours before following up on someone else’s scoop – to a minor annoyance. A reporter beaten on a story can read someone else’s scoop in 140 characters, call a source, tweet “can confirm” and move on to the next thing. Twitter’s place in the sports media system oriented independent journalism around the scoop while at the same time completely devaluing it.

Being second is fine, say in-house reporters, so as long as you have accurate information, “I don’t consider myself someone who is looking to break news,” said one in-house reporter. “Someone might get hurt and the PR guy might call me first. I’m not spending a ton of my day worrying about that.” Getting beaten on stories matters less to him because he knows the news will eventually be posted on the team’s website. That is also true for bigger stories, such as player trades. Another writer said being first on those sorts of stories does not matter to him professionally, “To me, it’s something that’s going to come out anyway. It’s just a trade. They’re going to announce it. So it’s fine with me.”

As discussed in Chapter 3, in-house reporters define the terms of reportorial competition around access, quality and volume. Incidentally, this is what they are able to provide in ways

independent media members may not. Accompanying the retreat from breaking news is the suggestion that the effort expended on these stories is harmful to journalistic standards. This is the boundary work of expulsion, pointing to the ways independent reporters can be led to violate ethical standards in pursuit of being first on a story. Many in-house reporters said the economics of the news industry cause their independent counterparts to value accuracy less than a rush of pageviews.

I would say there's a little bit too much emphasis on trying to be first instead of being accurate these days. I think a lot of that is prompted by the pressure of social media. That's just me being an old, cranky guy. Even though I enjoy the social media stuff, and I think it's a good tool and a good way to interact with your readers. It's a good tool. But I think sometimes, like anything else, it can be misused. The pressure to get stuff out there first sometimes leads to sloppiness. Before all this, there were some filters. You weren't doing news in real time.

This writer pointed to the misinformation following the 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut as example in which speed trumped accuracy with serious consequences. Independent sports reporters are not making mistakes of this magnitude, but sliding standards are endemic to the industry.

It's so hard to be first. You don't know who's going to throw the tweet out there or the blog post out there and get ahead of you. That leads to a lot more erroneous reporting. When you call one more source and flesh out the story, you find out that it's just not true. People are not fleshing it out, and there are lot more mistakes made because being first has trumped being accurate and throwing it online.

This is the boundary work of expulsion at work. In-house reporters are pointing out the ways independent one are failing to live up to ethical standards.

One in-house reporter pointed to an example where one of the players was rumored to be competing in one of the skills competitions during the league's All-Star weekend. Many outlets reported this would occur based on anonymous sourcing, but it turned out not to be true. The desire to be first on that piece of information led the independent beat writers into a mistake.

I'm lucky enough in that I don't report anything like that until the team tells me or there's an official release ... If it's wrong and he doesn't compete in the competition, there's no real cost for the person who reported it, I heard it and I reported it, an anonymous source said so. So they really aren't going to be called on it. But I don't even have to worry about that. Until it's officially a fact, until it is a fact, I don't write about it. That's a nice aspect of my job.

This is by no means a major scoop, but independent journalists pushed to have this information in order to attract readers. The in-house reporter did not have to worry about that, and therefore avoided making a mistake. Yet here as well, official acknowledgement is what made something a fact. And from the perspective of many interviewees, independent reporters face very few consequences for getting stories wrong. People are not fired for mistakes and fans appear to continue clicking on stories.

Do consumers care? I don't know. A lot of major websites are doing a lot of erroneous reporting. It doesn't seem to harm their credibility. People are not embarrassed if they're getting their name on the ESPN ticker or the (League network). There are some sacrifices being made.

Committing fact errors is anathema to journalism ethics, of course. Waiting for stronger confirmation is never a bad idea. But an in-house reporter will never override the team's judgment and choose to publish something after it has been confirmed to his satisfaction. This is team control of information through the guise of ethical journalistic practice.

Mlb.com beat writers are not team employees, and therefore are insulated from rules that govern team employees. Their bosses want them to break news, but they say they apply higher standards than some independent writers. Unlike some of the team-based writers, who never address rumors, mlb.com writers say they are expected to engage with the speculation going around. That said, they are required to do it responsibly. As one writer said:

They don't want to put something up on a team's website that is wrong or is speculative in nature. ... You can address rumors. I've written about rumors and speculated about things that could be going on. ... So I wouldn't say we go overboard, but we really go through multiple layers of making sure something's accurate before it appears on the site.

But they are necessarily going to be more patient when it comes to reporting a trade or a personnel change, “If I’m not the first one to report a trade, I don’t lose any sleep over that,” said one writer. Rumors are part of the job, but maintaining credibility is more important than other considerations. In the end, being wrong implicates not only the writer and mlb.com, but also the team, even though the organizational structure of the site is supposed to emphasize the distinctions between the two.

As discussed in Chapter 4, in-house writers post news only after it has been fully verified by the team.

You’re not going to see me react something that says report: (team) talking to X about offensive coordinator position. ... That’s not something you’d see me do because it’s not official. Once it’s official, when someone has a contract extension and if no one else is saying it and we happen to be the first people to say it, the yes, we’d break that news. It’s not a priority for me to break news, for me to have something that’s the new when the news is done. Our job is not breaking news.

As another writer said, being an in-house reporter means that chasing rumors is simply a less important of the job, “In my position now, most rumors that come out about the program, I know the truth about. They’re pretty good about keeping me in the loop. ... I don’t have to respond to that. It’s not my job to follow those up.” The main challenge instead is being ready when something happens so that the content is better. The in-house site might break news by accident, such as reporting something not especially high-profile; the signing of a back-up or a practice squad player that may not rate much coverage in the independent press. In-house reporters may get some advance notice on that information, although that varies.

For those operating outside the breaking news environment then, the in-house reporter stands in opposition to what they describe as speculation. In-house reporters construct their professional identity around journalism because they seek to make claims for their own personal authority. Journalism connotes truth and independence, and finding ways to assert that allows

them to make certain claims about their own work. This is how they operate within their workplace. When they interact with fans or write news stories, they are doing so in order to establish themselves as trustworthy, honest brokers for information. In a communication system that encourages reporters to build personal followings (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010), journalistic credibility brings audiences into those networks.

Yet in-house reporters' claims for authority have the secondary effect of protecting the team's place as a primary source of information. Breaking news emerges outside the context of an official team release. In-house reporters engage in boundary work to define a professional identity for themselves. But this independence is actually put to work to establish and preserve the team's authority and control over information. In-house reporting constructs the team as authoritative and makes the case that independent journalists should treat them that way as well. In-house reporters' boundary work helps define the team's brand.

Case study: Covering the intersection of sports and social movements

Of course, teams are not the only ones with messages to send. New communication tools have enabled many others to make their voices heard independent of the sports media production complex. Athletes have taken to social media to promote their own brands and extend their own sponsorship income, but also to make political statements (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2014). In the fall of 2014, many professional and college athletes lent their voices to a national wave of protests against disproportionate use of force by police against people of color (Zirin, 2014). In so doing, they introduced politics into sports, a controversial act, given a generally expressed cultural preference for keeping the two separate (Cunningham & Regan, 2011; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Hartmann, 2007; Strenk, 1979). For social movement actors gaining access to the press is often a key challenge (Gitlin, 1980). For contemporary athletes, finding the media is not a

problem. Of course, the media corps now includes in-house reporters, who balance producing news with brand considerations.

This section examines how in-house reporters approached acts of political protest. The newsworthiness of an unexpected story like a star player raising political issues would potentially appeal to the journalistic side of the in-house reporters' professional identity. This is a news event. Meanwhile, acts of protest by players violate the cultural preference for separating sports and politics while the team's brand in contentious social issues. If, as described above, in-house reporters work to protect the team's brand, what happens when players act in ways that potentially endanger it? What guidance does in-house reporters' professional identity offer in this instance?

I find here that those working for NBA teams tended to engage with acts of protest, either on the team site or through their social media presences. Writers for NFL teams essentially ignored them. In all cases, writers described themselves as the final arbiters of whether they addressed the players' actions, pointing to the independence they say they have within their roles. The decisions reporters made in response to these protests exhibited a shared belief that the role of team media is to report newsworthy events accurately, rather than try to shape public perceptions. In the context of these protests, decisions made by reporters reflected their own beliefs about what mattered rather than the positions of the team or league in relation to the protest.

Media traditionally have treated protest and protest groups negatively, devaluing social movements by employing what McLeod (2007) calls the protest paradigm. This describes a set of coverage techniques that marginalize social movement actors and their agendas, including focusing on social norm violations, covering events rather than issues, privileging official

sources and giving opponents the space to define the goals of the protest (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Sports media has reacted especially negatively to activism, perhaps due to its lack of a problem orientation (Rowe, 2007). Many view sports reporters as hostile to activism by athletes (Edwards, 1969; Korr, 2002; Peterson, 2009). Anything that disrupts the games tends to be treated negatively (Bishop, 2009). The concept of journalistic professionalism has in the past led sportswriters away from addressing political issues in their reporting (Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Lipsyte, 1975). Yet as athletes use social media and other outlets to share their views without traditional mediation, they seem to speak out more often. If in-house reporters view themselves as journalists, it seems possible they would employ similar approaches as independent reporters.

Yet team media is not subject to the same pressures as the independent media. Culver & Mirer (2015) describe team media as an outgrowth of content marketing, which is, at heart, promotional. But the business pressures exert themselves on a situation like this in many ways. Michael Jordan famously explained his own avoidance of politics by saying, “Republicans buy sneakers too” (Cunningham & Regan, 2011). They also buy jerseys and personal seat licenses. Teams also have an interest in protecting the players who represent them. A negative story in team media about a player’s act of protest might create more publicity for a story teams would rather ignore. It also might strain relationships with players and send negative messages to those considering joining the team in future. On the other hand, positive stories might damage the team’s marketing relationships if a sponsor objects to a political stand. For the in-house reporter, these stories represent a credibility contest. This sort of unexpected story tests the boundaries they have spent so much energy erecting.

“Not my job”

Prior to a Nov. 30 home game against the Oakland Raiders, five St. Louis Rams receivers took the field with their hands up. The players said they made the gesture to evoke the protests in

nearby Ferguson, where a police officer had killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown. Days before the game, a St. Louis County Grand Jury declined to indict the officer, touching off protests in surrounding area. The players' actions became a major story, especially after the St. Louis County police union demanded an apology.

The Rams' in-house reporter made no mention of the players' gesture in any way. The game report about a 52-0 defeat of the Raiders emphasizes the team's dominant performance. Written follow-up coverage during the next few days echoes this theme. But this focus on the team site does not mean that the team was ignoring the gesture. During his Monday follow-up news conference, Rams head coach Jeff Fisher took four minutes of questions about the player protests. During this period, the coach said he wanted to keep sports and social issues separate, announced there would be no forthcoming fines and said he supported the players "exercising their right to free speech." A write-up on the Rams' site, headlined "Fisher Press Conference Highlights: 12/1," begins its summary of the press conference after attention turns to on-field concerns. The written portion of the package omits all mentions of questions about Ferguson, the protests and the players' reaction. The team site did post the full video of the press conference, but never made it clear that the statements about the players' actions were in the video.

Team insider Myles Simmons said these stories fell outside his job description. He said his job – his beat – is to cover the football side of the team. So in a season in which the team drafted and then cut the first openly gay player in the NFL and continued to explore relocating to Los Angeles (they announced they would in January 2016), Simmons' work focused on wins and losses. "Those are primarily things that I leave alone because they don't have much to do with what's going on on the field," Simmons said of the political issues. "My job is to be a football reporter. Those are the sort of things I do tend to stay away from." Simmons was one of the few

interviewees who did not view himself as a journalist, but rather as an employee of marketing. While credibility with the audience mattered to him, he also felt his job was to “sell the Rams brand of football.” Protest is not part of that brand.

That said, the team never really arrived at an official position. The team’s director of communications told a gathering of academics I attended that many in the marketing department wanted the team to censure the players in some way to quiet some of the controversy the actions kicked up (Twyman, 2015). Top management, however, strongly supported the players, resisting calls for apologies from local police groups (Wagoner, 2014). The decision not to engage with the protests then did not necessarily support the team’s strategy in its emerging conflict with the police union, although it did represent the position of the marketing department, in which Simmons works. Sticking to the on-field information does reflect the site’s ongoing mission to promote interest in the team. The only reference to Ferguson in team-controlled media channels came obliquely in a tweet showing the players and staff with locked arms during the national anthem and reading, “in support of St. Louis,” with no further elaboration.³

A week after the Rams players’ act of protest, Detroit Lions running back Reggie Bush wore a hand-lettered “I Can’t Breathe” shirt during pregame warmups, calling attention to death of Eric Garner’s at the hands of police on Staten Island. While two writers for the Lions’ website produced four stories about the game, none refers to the shirt in any way. In-house writer Tim Twyman said the decision not to take up the shirts was his alone.

I cover football. I write about football. I think people come to read me to read about football. And that was just a story that I didn’t care about to be honest with you. It’s not in my wheelhouse. It’s not that we were being told not to write it, or I was told I couldn’t. If something affects the football field, a guy getting arrested, something like that, and it affects football, to me that’s a story. But the other stuff, and the Reggie Bush stuff, some of those things, I just don’t care. It’s a personal decision like that. I control content in terms of what I want to write so if it doesn’t strike my fancy I don’t write about it.

³ <https://twitter.com/STLouisRams/status/539117084412624896>

Twentyman cast his decision in terms of his own news judgment. He said he made the independent decision not to take up a controversial statement. This was true even after the Lions' head coach strongly endorsed Bush's actions in the postgame press conference (Seidel, 2014).

Other aspects of the team site did pick up the story. In what it calls the, "The Daily Dish," the Lions team site linked to independent media stories about the game. Among these links were stories from local media outlets discussing Bush's decision to wear the shirt and emphasizing the head coach's support of Bush. Stories about the shirt, therefore, were not deemed out of bounds by the team's digital media staff, just the in-house reporter. The team leadership was generally supportive of its players. Twentyman, however, said he was exercising his own news judgment when opting not to take on the story. The construction of a journalistic identity by these writers seeks to establish the idea of professional control over information. The approach to the story allowed this writer to assert that while avoiding something that could have led to controversy.

[Derailed plans for coverage](#)

One in-house writer planned to cover protests, but did not in the end. Chicago Bulls guard Derrick Rose was the first NBA player to wear an "I Can't Breathe" shirt, before a Dec. 7 game. The Bulls website did not carry any direct mention of the shirts or their star player wearing them. This was not a team decision said in-house reporter Sam Smith, who produces stories for bulls.com. Smith said he had been planning to write about the shirts as part of his postgame story. Early in the game, however, Smith sent a tweet making reference to the shirt, "Rose pregame to (Golden State Warriors') bench to hug favorite former coach Ron Adams. Rose had 'I can't breathe' pregame t-shirt and Bulls gasping down 20-8 " (Graef, 2014). Smith

said the reference to gasping was accidental and apologized the next day, but many on social media objected to the tone of the tweet.

[The team has] never told me not to write something. I would have wrote that. I actually got in trouble with that one, and not with the Bulls. ... I got bombarded on Twitter [following the tweet] ... It shows the lunacy of people. The notion [was] that I was making light of this thing, so I got death threats. But the point is, I'm supposedly making light, which I wasn't. It just so happened to be the same day. They said I was making fun of somebody who had died, so let's kill you. ... I was going to write about it, but because I had done this by mistake, I didn't write about it anymore because people were [angry]. No, they would not have objected to it if I have written about that.

The choice of whether to write or not write this story rested with Smith himself. His decision was not based on news values, however, but the response to the public outcry over his own statement.

At a newspaper, a bad tweet likely would not have obviated the need for a story. In fact the bad tweet might have threatened his job in a newsroom, although the team did not seem to care.

Smith said the fact that he could make this decision reflected the independence he has in his role.

What matters most here for the maintenance of journalistic identity is that Smith viewed this as his choice alone and understood that he had the freedom to write it. This reflects the independence in-house reporters claim to have.

“I Did What I Do”: Direct engagement with the acts of protest

The Portland Trail Blazers gave the fullest account of the shirts. In-house reporter Casey Holdahl published a 542-word story on Dec. 10, before a game in Minnesota. The story focused on guard Damian Lillard, who wore, and encouraged his teammates to wear, “I Can’t Breathe” shirts.⁴ The story quotes Lillard drawing comparisons between the Eric Garner case and that of Oscar Grant, who was killed outside a train station in Oakland in 2009. According to the story, Lillard grew up in Oakland and knew Grant, who was close friends with his brother. Holdahl illustrated his story with Instagram photos of Trail Blazers’ players warming up in the shirts. The

⁴ <http://forwardcenter.net/lillard-wears-i-cant-breathe-shirt-pregame-in-minnesota/>

story describes the choice to wear the shirts as “bucking NBA rules,” acknowledging NBA Commissioner Adam Silver’s expressed preference that players wear league-approved warmups (Rhoden, 2014). Yet it ends on a conciliatory note, in which Lillard praises Silver’s restraint in not issuing fines, saying, “I think it shows that (Silver) respects that we have a mind of our own.”

Holdahl said he was the sole decision-maker in terms of choosing whether or not to write about the shirts.

By the time guys from our team started to wear them it had already been three or four days since Derrick Rose and (Cleveland star) LeBron James and some of the other teams had done that. It was something I’d already been thinking about and wondering if anyone on our team did it, how would I go about covering it. But it was never a conversation internally or with anyone outside of myself. ... When (Lillard) came out wearing that shirt, I saw him wearing it, I said, ‘Whoa. I’m going to write a story about it.’ I did what I do, which is I see a storyline and I report and then I write it. Then I send it to the people who disseminate things through the website. At that point in time if they had decided, ‘hey this is something we don’t want to touch,’ it would have been promoted only through my social channels.

The story was promoted by the team’s Twitter feed, a sign that it was welcome by the team’s marketing department.⁵

Holdahl said his decision to write about the shirts was informed by the team’s culture, which seeks to “empower” players. That organization encourages players speak their mind on issues they care about.

Part of [being player-first] is letting those guys have their own voices. ... They are very adamant that players are actually people and not just basketball players. What they decide to speak on is their right. And from the organization’s perspective, we feel like we should support them in that. One way to do that is to actually promote it. That’s what we did in that case. As I mentioned, it was something that had happened pre-game. I had an idea that someone might do it, but I wasn’t sure, we had never talked about it before. Damien wore the shirt, I wrote it up, I sent it to them and they used it. It was really more of ‘this is what we do, we’re going to be open and honest about it.’ Someone from the [Portland] Oregonian is obviously going to write a story about it, so why shouldn’t we do the same?

⁵ <https://twitter.com/trailblazers/status/542832028061032448>

Holdahl's story hits many of the same themes as the independent newspaper's stories about the shirts. Holdahl's responses reflect a journalistic approach; he found a story and said it was his job to report it. This struck him as consistent with his approach to coverage of the team. Yet the considerations around whether to approach the story also were rooted in the team's organizational culture. A team portal writing about police brutality seems an unlikely choice had it not been attempting to construct itself as a journalistic outlet. Yet in this case journalism also supports team goals. Journalistic content can be put to strategic ends, which is at the root of the relationship between sports and media.

The second team to give the shirts space in its primary team media was the Brooklyn Nets. Members of the team wore "I Can't Breathe" shirts during a game against the Cleveland Cavaliers (who wore similar shirts) on Dec. 8. Nets.com beat writer Lenn Robbins said he produced game reports in notebook style, which opened with a long lead item, some key facts and figures and concluded with a section called "Talk" that contained a key quotation from a player or coach. For the Dec. 8 game, Robbins' story put discussion of the shirts in that final section:

Talk: Several of the Nets wore "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts during the pregame warmup. (Nets guard) Deron Williams said they were courtesy of JAY Z. Nets Coach Lionel Hollins said he had no problem with his players taking a social stand. "They should do that," said Hollins. "It's their right as citizens of America."⁶

Robbins, a veteran print reporter who joined the Nets after more than two decades in newspapers, said that when he saw the shirts, he knew needed to address the story. Even on a busy night -- the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were in attendance -- Robbins expected the shirts to receive major play in the New York media. He said the story was a matter of ensuring

⁶ <http://www.nba.com/nets/blog/nets-are-royally-outmanned-110-88-loss-cleveland-cavaliers>

credibility. It would have been a problem if the rest of the media who covered the team mentioned it, but he did not. But he also made sure to let his bosses know what he was thinking.

It's not my first rodeo. You know there are going to be all sorts of sensitivities to a scenario like that. Regardless of what my personal views are, if players show up with "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts there's going to be a reaction. So the first thing I did was email the CEO and said, "We can't pretend it didn't happen, how much do you want to do?" To be honest, in a way, Lionel Hollins, the head coach, bailed us out because he was asked about it postgame. And he said, these guys are citizens of America, and that's the greatest part about being an American. You have the right to say what it is, whether it's popular, unpopular, you can do that. So that's how we did it. We put it in the talk portion, where I said these players wore the T-shirt and Hollins' quote. I didn't look at what the News or the Post did that day, about was it right or was it wrong? I didn't go there.

Robbins acted with the full knowledge of his bosses. In one sense he set the news agenda, saying that it was necessary to do the story; this reflects his own independence. That said, he negotiated that independence in real time, speaking to the higher-ups about how to approach this story. This sort of unexpected story required a real-time boundary negotiation, although he phrased it as a journalistic imperative. Those considerations governed his interaction with the team structure.

At the same time, in addressing the shirts, Robbins took a factual approach. He does not weigh in on the shirts, but rather reports the facts and provides a quote. The coach's quotation, offered in a press conference, frames the players' action within the context of free speech rights. This framing removes some of the oppositional nature of the protest. It quickly nods at the issues, and sidesteps any judgment on players mixing sports and politics. Rather it adopts the position that protest is patriotic, and that players were simply acting as Americans by speaking out on an issue important to them. The framing reconciles acts of protest with broadly held political values of free speech and personal autonomy, rather than with the specific issue of police violence. At the same time, he invokes ownership support by referring to Jay Z, a minority shareholder in the team. The team did not object directly to the shirts if the most visible member of the ownership group was on board.

Opposing the Nets that night were the Cleveland Cavaliers, who had two star players, LeBron James and Kyrie Irving, leading a group who wore “I Can’t Breathe” shirts. Longtime Cavs.com reporter Joe Gabriele posted about the shirts on his own social media accounts – tweeting “Here at Barclays Center for [#Cavs](#)-Nets, [@KingJames](#) and [@KyrieIrving](#) both wearing ‘I Can’t Breathe’ shirts during warmups,” and then added a picture of Irving taking the court in the shirt.⁷ The team website also hosted a live blog through the service Cover it Live, which captured tweets from team personnel. Although Gabriele’s tweets are not included in that stream, a message from a team broadcaster is included, which includes a wide-angle picture of the team going through warm-ups, in which James wearing his “I Can’t Breathe” shirt is visible in the top right corner.⁸

Gabriele said the team website stays away from “negative” stories, like arrests or off-court issues, but did not view James and Irving wearing shirts as a negative story.

I tweeted about it and wrote about it in the postgame, but I think as long as I kept it factual and tried not to import my opinion too much into it and let the story speak for itself ... again, I did write about it, I do write about those things. We don’t look to that as a negative. We looked at it as a positive that LeBron was speaking out and wanted to get his message out, so we had no problem covering that or promoting it.

The site did not dwell on the protest acts or take a position in any way. The team site provided a factual account, in keeping with the definition of journalism for in-house reporters. The game report led with the presence of the English royalty in the arena and the game photo gallery contained images of James posing with the Duke and Duchess, but none of the shirts.

⁷ <https://twitter.com/CavsJoeG/status/542114148101144578> and <https://twitter.com/CavsJoeG/status/542116117737897984>

⁸ <http://www.nba.com/cavaliers/news/gameday-blog-nets-141208>

After each game, Cavs.com collects audio clips from the postgame interviews on a separate page. The unedited interview sessions with James, Irving and head coach David Blatt all include questions and answers about the shirts, in addition to questions about the game and the presence of the royal family. James and Irving discuss their reasoning for wearing the shirts. Blatt supports his players in similar terms as the Nets coach. Most of the other audio recordings collections from other games include some transcribed quotes. The Dec. 8 postgame page did not include a selected quotation from each person listed. The team website did in later days highlight the activism in its news roundups when it linked to stories about the team in external media, including one from a Cleveland newspaper quoting President Obama praising James for wearing the shirt. In all cases, the information about players engaged in protest was available, if not necessarily emphasized. Moreover the decision to publicize this information was filtered through the lens of the protests being positive behavior that was good for the team's image.

For those who took up the stories, they wrote with the goal of representing facts rather than making a persuasive case on behalf of or against the acts of protest. This reflects the commitment to accuracy that in-house reporters claim as a major part of their professional identity. The shirts were a fact worth reporting and they did so. Their presence and the reactions were rendered accurately. Those reporters could argue they were doing their journalistic duty, reflecting the boundary work they engage in.

Moreover, the decisions underscored the independence in-house reporters argue they have. In the case of the Brooklyn Nets, the stories reflected the views of at least one member of team ownership, although many people have stakes in the team. Overall, the NBA did not approve institutionally of players taking these actions. Though no sanctions or fines were issued,

Commissioner Adam Silver spoke openly about his preferences for players to wear sponsored warm-up outfits. Yet NBA team writers took up the issue. In the two NFL cases, the players received backing from team officials, but the in-house reporters did not engage with the protest. Reporters who covered protests and those who ignored it were equally likely to invoke independence. They said it was their choice and the decisions reflected that. When pushed, in-house reporters also pointed to institutional guidelines. Some pointed the team's approach to supporting players or writers' understandings of their own job descriptions. That writers took similar paths to different decisions reflects the hybrid nature of the in-house reporters' professional identity. It is informed by journalism, but not necessarily a full expression of it.

How readers respond to in-house media

Boundary work as a framework defines a role for the audience in articulating what journalism is. Credibility contests resolve jurisdictional claims, but the general public grants authority to a professional group. Journalism matters as an occupational category because the public vests journalists with authority over news. If the public did not view the profession as especially important, it seems doubtful in-house reporters would go to their lengths they do to adapt journalistic ethics.

The responses to the protest actions via social media and comment sections suggests that audiences processed in-house content as one might information produced in independent contexts. Even as rams.com avoided direct engagement with the protest, the site's comment section became an active space for political discussion. These spaces gave over to often vitriolic discussions of the case, and the grand jury decision. "RAMS YOU ARE LOSERS," wrote one user. "mr brown deserved what he got. he was a punk thug loser. a fat ass that could

not work.” These comment sections also included narratives of fans supposedly abandoning the team

I have been a die hard Rams fan for 52 years ... Yesterday was so disappointing for me I felt humiliation and disappointment that this occurrence in Ferguson would be brought to the football field. there [sic] are so many occurrence's in our world that we watch sports to get away for a while. I do agree with [name of previous commenter] I think the Rams owe the police officers an apology. There are good police officers and there is also bad just as in any group of people and our Sports teams need not take matters into their hands. I unfortunately will be looking for a new team.”

There are no ways to confirm the truthfulness of these statements. The Rams, for instance, had only been in St. Louis since 1995 – and many of the people posting comments through Facebook listed cities far from Missouri listed as their hometowns. Yet we see here that the presence of journalistic content on the team site may lead people to process the information as though it were news content. Many of these comments read as something that might be found in a comment section beneath a story on the St. Louis Post-Dispatch's site.

The discussions under these stories spun off in many directions, including a debate over free speech rights at work. “While I support everyone's right to free speech, these players made the ‘hands up, don't shoot’ gesture while in the uniform of the St. Louis Rams and during ‘work’ hours,” noted one fan who argued that the Rams were adopting that point of view by failing to punish the players. Later in the thread another commenter disagrees, “those five players don't owe anyone a dam thing!! there is something in America called freedom of speech!! and they have that right. not cause their black everyone has that right!!” This touched off a discussion in which fans objected, “They have the right but doing so at work they can also be fired.” Others pivoted to the facts of the case:

They have the right to free speech, but the football field is not the place to be doing what they did. I feel bad that Michael Brown was shot and killed, but you've got to look at his character and his actions. He robbed a store, he was walking in the middle of the street

and the officer told him to get out of the street, Michael tried to get his gun and that is proven in the evidence and he was trying to get the officers [sic] gun.”

It is noteworthy that the Rams’ site came to host decidedly non-football related discussions. By adopting some of the techniques of journalism, the site appears to invite behavior that matched what is often found in news site comment sections. Audiences treated them as deliberative spaces for issues well beyond the team’s competitive fortunes. It complicates the marketing function of the team website. Being seen to be on one side of an active local controversy may not be particularly good for business. The entry into journalistic genre conventions – news, comment sections – may set a level of expectations for those coming to the site. It orients the work back toward civic engagement rather than commercial identity, something that will be important to keep in mind during Chapter 6. Comment sections would be one way to gauge audience response to in-house content, an important future direction for this work.

The Cleveland Cavaliers site included one opposing comment in its game blog from the game against Brooklyn. It read:

The Cadaviliers [sic] just lost me as a fan a TV watcher with their shirts at the start of the game reading “I can’t breathe.” Well, that’s too bad! When you know ALL the facts surrounding this “incident”, then you can express an opinion! Until then, count me out as a fan.

This was an isolated comment, one that suggests some resistance to the idea of the team becoming a site for protest.

The importing of journalistic conventions by in-house reporters help define how users understand the in-house site. The presence of comment sections, or even availability of writers on Twitter as in the case of the Bulls, builds in immediate feedback loops more associated with journalism (Robinson, 2011), than with strategic communication. Team websites are tools of

marketing and commerce. Turning them into information portals, however, changes how they are understood and used. By implicating journalistic ideology through the hiring of reporters and the boundary work those reporters engage in, they create a marketing platform that may serve as anti-marketing at times. Republicans buy tickets too, although in-house reporters cannot necessarily cater to those fans without damaging their own journalistic identity.

Conclusion

Breaking news represents the introduction of new facts into the media system. This chapter finds that despite claims to journalistic identity, breaking news is not a core job practice for the in-house reporter. Information like contract terms, trade rumors or internal conflicts, staples of sports media, still belong to independent reporters alone. It is tempting to say that this information usually runs contrary to the team's interests, except that team executives are often eager to volunteer those stories or act as sources. Team executives will talk about trades they almost made or dish dirt on players or managers when they are on the way out (For example, Himmelsbach, 2016; Hohler, 2011). These stories can be thought of as breaking news and often represent the product of doing journalism, but they also require the team's cooperation. Simply getting information published first is not necessarily the outcome of an adversarial process. Yet in-house reporters also say they stand apart when it comes to getting the team's viewpoint on an issue out. They may report it, but they will not shape it. Opting out entirely may help them avoid sticky political situations within their workplaces.

In-house reporters view breaking news as wasted effort in an era in which a scoop broken on Twitter is exclusive for mere moments. In-house reporters are more likely to compete with independent reporters over feature stories. These are not traditionally thought of as breaking news. Scoops are valorized in journalistic lore, although well-told features often yield their own level of prestige. An in-house reporter's feature story may be more likely to be dismissed as a

puff piece or an act of public relations. But these stories often become the ones with lasting impact. There is little surprise that in-house reporters would stress these ones as a journalistic ideal, given that they best positioned to tell them. They believe they are most likely to obtain a player's trust and negotiate access to allow for a more complete telling of the story. Moreover, they question whether the work engaged in to break news actually damages journalism's reputation. Trying to beat the formal announcement often leads to inaccurate reporting.

Within the Black Lives Matter stories, in-house reporters used their journalistic identities to guide their actions, even if it led them to different outcomes. One felt it was his job to tell a specific set of stories, while another said it did not meet his journalistic standards as newsworthy. The former defined it as outside his beat. That latter used the language of independence. These are statements of professional values. Those who took the story up defined it as newsworthy before producing their stories. At the same time, they framed it in ways meant to depoliticize the acts of protest, minimizing the ruptures in normal practice. They valorized speaking out rather than the messages themselves, pointing to them as expressions of American values. This kept the brand away from some of the politics being introduced. As discussed in Chapter 4, facts matter more than frames.

Much of sportswriting is values laden, and the internationalization of sports makes that an interesting proposition. An independent reporter taking on the protests in the context of societal values likely is speaking to a geographically defined audience. The Portland Oregonian's work is read primarily in one place. An in-house writer speaking to team-constituted audience may be speaking across cultures. Multiple writers interviewed for this project discussed having an international audience for their work (Portland's team in 2015 had one starter from France, The Nets are owned a Russian billionaire, LeBron James is an international star). Embedding the team

in American values is a choice to localize the team rather than emphasize its international character. Free speech carries different connotations in France and China, where the NBA is popular (one team has an alternate jersey with Mandarin letters). Those who took up the story embedded their team and their team's website in the practice of American democratic engagement, attaching these actions to a local controversy. People who claim a journalistic identity are embedding the team in the realm in political practice, which is where journalism should sit.

Through the lens of breaking news, we can see the emphasis on accuracy trumping that of independence, a ranking of ethics with a clear meaning. Reporting the truth is a journalistic ethic, one that in-house reporters stress above all others. In-house reporters say their independent counterparts are more prone to mistakes because they try to get in front of the news. At the same time engaging in values talk as they did around Black Lives Matter shows that in-house reporters are still addressing themselves to a local public, at least in part. They are continuing to reproduce the routines of independent reporters even if their work is addressed to a much less well-defined audience. This may separate them from the marketing strategy of the team, which incorporates international fans in a variety of ways. Localizing the coverage is an adaptation of journalistic routines, a way of arguing for inclusions in definitions of sports journalism. The local beat writer maintains an avatar of that position.

The doctrinal debate over breaking news represents the boundary work of expulsion. In-house reporters dismiss the value of the breaking news in part because it is the sort of reporting they cannot engage in. Describing it as a distraction from meatier storytelling makes it seem as though their objections are rooted in journalistic concerns. The stories that best serve the readers are the ones that tell the best yarns, not the ones that break the most news. Yet this claim defines

journalism in a way that gives the teams and the sporting institutions more control over information. The type of feature reporting in-house reporters attach great value to relies on access and is more easily regulated by institutional actors. At the same time, the type of news whose importance they reject removes control of information from the team. The leak of trade talks or of a plan to fire someone causes a reaction from the public and from the principals involved in a situation. In-house reporters' view of journalism proposes a view of the profession that gives teams or leagues greater control over information.

Chapter 6: Playing the right way: Ethical discourse as boundary work

The data presented in the previous three chapters described the ways in-house sports reporters engage in boundary work to construct a journalistic identity despite working for the teams and leagues they cover. Chapter 3 showed how they emphasize the similarities between their work practices and those of independent journalists, while at the same drawing on available resources to emphasize the distinctions between themselves and other team employees, especially the public relations staff. In doing so they locate themselves in the sports media information network and articulate their journalistic identity through their connections to other nodes. Chapter 4 parsed the ways in-house reporters define journalism, especially the cardinal ethics of truth-seeking and independence while working in a team context. Chapter 5 applied these findings to the practice of breaking news, both generally and in a moment in which social protest intruded on sports. From a journalism perspective, the application of these ethics is limited by the ways in-house reporters define truth and how they build their source networks. These practices construct the teams as stewards of information, which is not a journalistic outcome.

This approach to professional self-definition hinges on claims about journalism's ethics, even if it is never explicitly framed that way. In-house reporters understand that their employment relationships violate the letter of journalism's ethics codes. Taking a paycheck from the team prevents true independence, which is the underpinning of journalism's approach to seeking truth. Limiting financial entanglements between journalists and the institutions they cover is the primary objective of the Associated Press Sports Editors' code of ethics, which is, of course, impossible for an in-house reporter. His paycheck comes emblazoned with a team logo. Journalism's ethical canon seeks to establish the credibility of those who adhere to it. In-house reporters engage in boundary work to build authority with audiences, a necessary step if they are

to be accepted by readers as legitimate sources of information about the team. That authority is rooted in ethical discourse.

Most accounts of professionalism treat ethics codes as a key step on the road to a higher status, a sign of a group's emerging coherence on values questions (Abbott, 1988). But ethics codes also reflect the articulation of a profession's values, a way of explaining why it is making a jurisdictional claim. Ethical discourse is itself boundary work, a means of defining a profession's view of itself, its place in society and the important distinctions between itself and other groups (Singer, 2015). In a moment of unstable boundaries, the in-house reporter's claim to the status of journalist requires a full engagement with the central ethics of the profession. This takes on the form of expansion, where in-house reporters locate themselves within the field. It also manifests as expulsion, as in-house reporters attempt to position their practices as more ethically rigorous than those of independent reporting, especially on questions of accuracy.

In-house reporters embed their claims to journalistic status within ethical discourse, bending core journalistic concepts like seeking truth and independence to fit their own professional situations. In-house reporters do articulate the idea that their work serves the public as best it can. This distinguishes them from those who serve their clients or employers, although this research has explored the limits of that in practice. This chapter argues that in-house reporters' ethical claims imagine a professional system that empowers sporting organizations to take firmer control of information. In-house reporters' boundary work ostensibly constructs professional authority without addressing the normative claims journalism makes on behalf of itself. These redefinitions negate at least some of what journalism ethics seeks to create. Still, in-house reporters are participating in the cultural conversation around sports, and as communicators in our newly open media system acquire ethical responsibilities. Drawing on

Nick Couldry's work on mixed-media ethics (2013), this chapter lays out what ethical principles for in-house sports writers might look like, guidelines that can be extended to producers of brand content as a whole. By mixed-media ethics I mean ethical guidelines that apply to all people using mediated communication, not just professionals. I argue here that mixed-media ethics represent a baseline, guidelines for everyone in the media system, but they do not speak to the specific concerns of professions working within media. Journalism ethics make different demands on practitioners because of what the profession seeks to provide.

Journalism ethics and boundary work

Journalists define their professional status through norms and ethics, using adherence to them as a way of determining who belongs as a member of their permeable occupational group (Singer, 2015). Journalists believe they provide the information that the public needs to be truly self-governing. The ethical practice of journalism enables individuals within a society to act as full participants in civic and cultural life. Ethical failures are not merely a professional problem, then. They ripple outward; decreasing public trust in journalism makes it more difficult for a society to define problems and craft solutions.

To put this in terms of boundary work, journalists propose a map of cultural authority in which professionally produced news informs the rest of society about current events. The work of journalism becomes the shared text for all parts of a society. Locating those obligations, at least in part, in the ethical sphere reflects the importance journalists place on their work and the public service they believe they provide. Embedded in journalism ethics is the argument that providing the information that serves as the basis for political, economic and cultural life is too important to be left to amateurs. Ethics codes underline journalists' view of the importance of news and turn that into an argument for the profession's authority. When engaging in boundary work, a group seeks to enlist the larger society in that profession's view of itself (Gieryn, 1999).

Ethics codes do that work both within the profession and outside it. Internally, they help build an occupational cohesion. Externally, they represent an argument about why journalism matters.

Discussions about the role of the press in society are rooted in debates about what society believes it needs from news (Siebert et al., 1956). This is an open debate that people inside and outside the profession have access to, especially in the digital age. A classic work like *Four Theories of the Press* positions press systems as expressions of the way a society understands the role of the individual in relation to the state and the nature of truth (p. 10). In an update to that text, Christians et al (2009) call out three levels of analysis for understanding a press system – a society's normative traditions, its political traditions and the roles it assigns media (p. 16). Enlightenment ideas about the role of rationality, truth and individual rights within the state underpin Western journalism although the specific form each takes often evolves (Ward, 2010). In the United States, popular sovereignty guides the political system, which demands an informed citizenry. Yet the American focus on social responsibility suggests that the press' normative responsibilities go beyond checking government power to providing a means for mass political participation.

The embrace of social responsibility theory by the profession represents journalism recalibrating itself to contemporary conditions, specifically concerns about media consolidation (Siebert et al, 1956, p. 78). As the original *Four Theories* points out, the number of American newspapers had been shrinking since at least the 1920s. Panels like the Hutchins Commission suggested that press regulation was needed, at least in part, to address emerging news monopolies or duopolies appearing in many cities at this time. The articulation of social responsibility theory represents journalism engaging in the protection of autonomy; one of the

boundary work strategies described by Gieryn, in which a profession acts to prevent outsiders from encroaching on its turf.

Earlier in the 20th century, after the World War I experience with propaganda, journalism redefined itself around the concept of objectivity, reworking its jurisdictional claim to build a clear distinction between the practice of public relations and journalism (Schudson, 2001). This articulation was rooted in changing views of social science rooted in the Progressive movement (Schudson, 1978). Ethical practice focused more squarely on truth and independence, constructing the journalist as an impartial observer in a world full of spin. This was the boundary work of expulsion, with journalists claiming news as their jurisdiction and denying that role to promotional and strategic communicators.

Ethics also have been part of the news business' commercial strategy. Adolph Ochs' famous declaration that the New York Times would "give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of the party, sect, or interests involved" appeared under the headline "Business Announcement" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 75). Fox News' claims of "Fair and Balanced" reporting are a marketing slogan borrowing heavily from the idea that journalism should be neutral and objective, a classic formulation in the profession. Journalism ethics are supposed to shield reporters from the business concerns of the companies they work for (Nerone, 2013). Journalists use ethics to differentiate themselves from strategic communicators and even their own editorial pages others on normative grounds. Their employers, meanwhile, use those distinctions to sell news products.

Journalism ethics codes appeared at a time when high barriers to entry made publishing news on a mass scale something limited to the few. The American Society of Newspaper Editors launched in 1922 with its ethics code, which Sigma Delta Chi (the precursor of the Society of

Professional Journalists) adapted six years later (Branson, 2002; Society of Professional Journalists, n.d.). Only a few businesses could afford to buy ink by the barrel or lease broadcast spectrum. A professional model for journalism makes sense in this context. When journalists act as the primary go-between for politicians, activists, businesses or sports teams and the public, ethics codes reflect that seriousness with which those view that responsibility. Failure to take those responsibilities seriously is grounds for expulsion from the profession, at least in terms of boundary work (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2013). Digital media have altered journalism's gatekeeping function. Media's choices matter because they are still major voices within information networks, but they are no longer the only ones, and they are increasingly subject to challenge. Journalism has struggled to adjust to this more open communication system (S. C. Lewis, 2012). The deployment of professionalism seeks to close systems and stabilize relationships. For journalists it was a means of asserting control over work or information. Technological shifts in media eroded that control (Abbott, 1988). As the boundaries of journalism have shifted in the face of rapid technological change, so too have the ethics that guide the field (Vanacker & Heider, 2015). Ethics codes represent an important way a profession constructs its boundaries.

Embedded within new media's rise is a critique of institutional journalism. Specifically, it highlighted the idea that journalism institutions had failed to meet their own ethical standards. The view articulated by some was that the practice of journalism took it further away from the values it was supposed to uphold (Gillmor, 2006). Pre-digital journalism oriented practitioners toward their sources (often people in positions of power), colleagues and supervisors, not the public. Digital publishing exists in a postmodern media system, in which traditional structures of authority are subject to critique in ways they had not been before (Robinson, 2006). Online

media enables a counter public sphere that allows previously marginalized voices direct access to an audience (Downey & Fenton, 2003). The clear demarcation between media producers and their audiences was, on some levels, a technological creation. For its bigger cheerleaders, the new media era opened up greater possibilities for deliberation and democratic engagement (Gillmor, 2006). This has happened, although as early as 2006, it was clear that some of these new voices and practices opened up a different set of ethical issues.

Participatory media pushed journalists “to define their professional niche as it is challenged by those who now work in a new medium” (Singer, 2003, p. 156). The breakdown of the press’ gatekeeping role eroded hard-won boundaries and forced journalism to justify itself again (Gade & Lowrey, 2011). Well into the digital era, the basis of journalistic identity still is not a settled question. Perhaps the role of the professional journalist is more as the convener of a conversation rather than source of a final word (Robinson, 2011). Singer (2006) defines the new journalist as “a socially responsible existentialist,” a reporter who accepts the individually focused ethical reasoning of existentialism, but embraces the new regime of accountability ushered in by participatory media. Professionals struggle with balancing between their own control over information and open participation, with the latter coming to be gradually and grudgingly accepted (S. C. Lewis, 2012).

Journalism’s embrace of new ethics demonstrates that the profession is engaging with these critiques. It also is a form of boundary work, redefining itself in response to specific challenges. By doing so journalists are trying to determine who belongs inside and outside the profession. This manifests on questions of transparency and accountability, where shifts show journalists attempting to account for new information flows in their professional ideology.

The rise of transparency as an ethic is an example of boundary work, an attempt to incorporate an institutional critique into standard journalistic practice. It invites the audience into the process of news gathering to the extent possible, using that openness as a means of establishing credibility (Singer, 2011, p. 222). No longer is working for a newspaper enough to vouch for a reporter's credibility. Alternatively, working for a website no longer denies someone authority. Transparency is a media ethic that those beyond the walls of a newsroom can adhere to. Journalism, as it did with its embrace of objectivity, is looking to the social sciences again with its openness about methods. Through transparency, journalists address their biases openly, which should be incorporated into how an audience evaluates information. This answers another critique of journalism, the idea that hidden preferences skewed news. The incorporation of transparency allows institutional journalism to make a claim on the best online work; opening doors for a range of storytelling methods.

The ethic of accountability also fits within this process of adjusting boundaries. The Society of Professional Journalists calls for accountability to encourage criticism, explain journalistic decisions and correct mistakes (via Ward, 2011, p. 76). Online media presents a new vision of accountability, one in which individuals can reply to journalists on a more equal footing than letters to the editor. Public service was always part of journalism's self-conception, which included a measure of accountability. Prior to the digital media era, audiences and others lacked ways to insisting on it publicly, meaning it often was meted out by editors, ombudsmen and sources rather than the public at-large (Plaisance, 2000).

Ethical discourse is central to the drawing of journalistic boundaries. The definition of journalism in the early days of the profession focused on serving a societal need that gave it a defined jurisdiction. Digital-era reporting seeks to assert its own authority by critiquing the

practice of institutional journalism, while at the same aligning its own ethics with classic journalistic values. Technology matters in all of these accounts, both for the construction of authority and the meeting of ethical obligations. As in-house sports reporters make claims to journalistic identity, their account of ethics becomes a means by which they locate themselves within the definition of the profession.

Sports journalism, in-house media and journalism ethics

Chapter 2 described how sports journalism has always existed on the margins of the profession in part because of perceptions of lax ethical standards. Many question the promotional component of sports reporting. Sports coverage promoted both the news organizations themselves and the subjects of sports stories (Kaniss, 1991; McChesney, 1989). Institutional journalism has not been wrong to question sports media; ethical shortcuts have been common over the long arc of the history of sports journalism (Evensen, 1993; Hardin, 2005). Knowing who won last night's game or a little more about the local baseball team's rightfielder does not rank as a matter of democratic importance. Taking on issues of social importance has never been a priority in sports media (Rosenstiel et al., 2005; Rowe, 2007).

Sports reporting is embedded in a web of institutional conflicts (Davis & Craft, 2000). Newspapers often sponsor local professional and college teams, creating a financial relationship distinct from the investment in coverage. Shifts in media ownership mean that team owners and media owners are often the same people. Billionaire John Henry owns both The Boston Globe and the Boston Red Sox. As one mlb.com writer pointed out in an interview:

The Chicago Tribune used to own the Cubs, so there's all these gray areas. It's different. The Chicago Tribune covering the Cubs is different than mlb.com covering the Cubs, but there's so much gray area now and all this overlapping and everyone's in bed with one another. You feel at some point everyone's going to have business relationships with everyone.

Other interview subjects observed that independent newspaper beat writers appear on Major League Baseball's television channel as expert sources and analysts. And this is before any discussion of how teams and leagues manipulate access or the "emotional graft" that comes from constant interaction (Towers, 1983). All of this moves away from the ethical ideal and shapes the coverage news agencies provide.

Online sports media regularly highlight ethical lapses. Gawker Media's Deadspin, a highly influential site, uses its lack of access as a selling point, claiming its lack of relationships with teams allows it to report without worrying about losing its credentials (Marston, 2015). Others have suggested that sportswriters, even those working online, trade favorable coverage for scoops (Draper, 2014). The critique of institutional media launched by online sites represents the boundary work of expulsion, pointing out when media institutions fail to live up to their own professed ethical standards. At the same time, new media outlets may not have been much better in their approach to ongoing scandals (Whiteside et al., 2012).

[In-house media](#)

In the interviews conducted for this project, most in-house reporters pointed to similarities in practices and professionalism as they articulated their professional identities. Only one interviewee brought up ethics on his own, pointing out then when teams brought in journalists they were importing a normative approach. "When you hire newspaper guys, there's going to be a code of ethics and code of conduct there, that writer said. "They're going to want to do things the way they did at the newspaper." Does that mean the Society of Professional Journalists or Associated Press Sports Editor code is operating this team website or any other? Certainly not, given that APSE's codes stresses eliminating financial entanglements between reporters and sporting institutions; it bans serving as an official scorer, for instance ("APSE Ethics Guidelines," n.d.). More likely it means that the in-house reporter will exert a level of

control over the content he produces. The conflicting pressures of an in-house role encompass and expand the conflicts that characterize sports journalism generally. In all cases, it seems the answer can be phrased as: it depends on your definition of independence or truth.

Building on data presented so far, this section will summarize the ethical claims made by in-house reporters. The project has shown that in-house sports media mix the ideology of pre-digital media and practices of the digital age in ways that make it an awkward fit into each. In-house sports media exist thanks to digital technology and the opening up of the media system. Practitioners are embedded in the give-and-take of digital media, communicating directly with the public and building credibility through interaction. In-house reporters' professional claims include an articulation of the idea of public service. Those who view themselves as journalists say their first responsibility is to fans, which is how an independent sports reporter would view her job. At the same time, its claim to authority is based access to institutional sources, the same claims independent media deployed against bloggers and others they viewed as interlopers. It assumes lines of authority over information rooted team and professional control. In-house reporters may even use these arguments to engage in the boundary work of expulsion against independent writers. In-house media use the language of journalism ethics to claim membership in the profession and critique other members.

In-house reporters should embrace ethical principles even if they remain estranged from journalism. As communicators with a privileged place in the sports media information network, their actions affect the ways we understand a key societal institution. I conclude this chapter by laying out a set of ethical guidelines for in-house reporters. These are adapted from work on mixed-media ethics, which ascribes normative responsibilities to all actors in a media system. As in-house media expands beyond sports – both in native advertising and other incarnations – new

voices are crowding into our media system. A full ethical account is necessary for those working as in-house media if it is to be understood distinct from traditional public relations, as appears to be a priority.

Accuracy

In-house reporters view accuracy as journalism's most important ethic. They believe their work provides the truth about the team they cover, which they say is increasingly lacking in a reporting world that rewards clickbait over shoe-leather reporting. In-house sites do very little opinion work. The in-house reporters interviewed here define themselves as beat writers who produce facts about the teams they cover. Reporting the truth is a cardinal journalism ethic and one that aligns with the vision of the profession in-house reporters articulate. Its importance, however, is rooted in a range of concerns, not just an ethical imperative for accuracy. Posting incorrect information wrong on a team website would open up the club to ridicule. Posting news before it is official might result in sanctions from the league. Failure to adhere to the norm of accuracy costs the team a measure of authority. In-house reporters' professional ideology and team authority are closely related.

For those who do not break news this is not much of an issue. They would never find themselves in front of a story. Even for writers at mlb.com, who write with a disclaimer about their independence and have an organizational mandate to be first when possible, getting the go-ahead from the public relations department before breaking a piece of news is common practice. This also may be true for independent reporters as well, but those working in traditional news roles might be more likely to take the word of people outside the team when evaluating a piece of information. Still, in-house reporters view their commitment to accuracy as the boundary work of expansion, using it as a way to claim membership in the field.

Yet this commitment to the ethic of accuracy also is expressed through the boundary work of expulsion. In-house reporters critique the failures of independent journalism as a means of vouching for their own practices. In-house reporters define seeking truth as a matter of waiting until the truth is ready, something they see disappearing from independent reporting. Traditional sports reporting has become increasingly rumor driven, they say. Incorrect information spreads more easily because many of the institutional controls have fallen away. Independent reporters seeking attention in a crowded media system rush into mistakes. In-house reporters think news editors tolerate these mistakes in ways they did not previously. As one writer said, “I see less (accountability) today than I have ever seen it in the past. I think there’s a great deal of accountability when you work for a team. I have a lot of people who expect and demand that.”

In-house reporters’ work routines curtail their search for the truth. The information they report comes almost entirely from within the team, with sources almost uniformly working within the organization. Most outside of mlb.com do not speak with agents or use them as sources. This diminishes the risk that an in-house reporter might encounter information he could not report. Sitting on stories would encroach on the journalistic identity in-house reporters construct. The in-house reporter understands the job to be telling the story of the team from the inside rather than the outside. As a general approach to breaking news, the goal here is not to challenge team control over information, but rather steer control back toward official sources. Their performance of journalism makes a claim for the superiority of the closed model of professionalism and pre-digital structures of authority.

Independent journalists could be a beneficiary of this boundary work. The in-house reporters’ epistemology constructs the team as a clearinghouse of information, and defines a more exclusive relationship between the club and the press. The rise of new media voices and the

expansion of information options outside the media flows described in Wenner's model (1989, fully described in Chapter 1) weakens institutional authority over information. The sports reporting those working in-house perform calls to mind a bygone era, one in which the media controlled the flow of information to the audience. The devaluing of the scoop and even the notes column about potential happenings in the league suggests a different approach.

Independence

In-house reporters understand independence as a difficult concept for themselves. The claims they make about it tend to correlate with the organizational structures they work within. Writers at mlb.com view themselves as independent based on their employment relationships. They work for Major League Baseball Advanced Media, which is a subsidiary of Major League Baseball, but separate from the teams they cover (each baseball team owns about a 3 percent stake in MLBAM as part of an initial investment in 2000). MLBAM is a media company rather than a sports organization, writers say. They often use the financial success of the company as proof that the more journalistic model at team sites is desired by audiences. They also use that distinction to define a boundary between themselves and others who work for team media in other leagues. "I'd much rather be a journalist at a newspaper or at mlb.com than I would in another league where there's more a PR side to it. It's nice not having to deal with that as much," one writer said. The boundary articulated in that sentence is unambiguous; mlb.com is like newspapers while in-house reporters in other leagues lack that sort of independence.

Writers at teams with standalone digital units also viewed that arrangement as ensuring a measure of independence. At least one in-house reporter said he never would have left his newspaper for a team site had there not been a team-run digital unit. Being housed in the marketing or public relations department would have reflected strategic communication to him

and he had no interest in that type of work. Digital units often bring together editorially focused employees, and writers within them describe a departmental culture more focused on creating engaging content rather achieving specific communication objectives for the team. Although they understand that their job is not to hurt the team; they are less focused on sharing any particular message. The few reporters in this project who did not view themselves as journalists tended to be clustered in the marketing departments. As noted in Chapter 3, very few writers worked in public relations departments. Maintaining a strict separation between in-house reporting and public relations is something both sides seek to enforce.

How well the audience understands these distinctions is an open question. In-house reporters want audiences to understand that the information that appears under their name reflects their own reporting and knowledge, not the team's position on an issue. This may be a difficult needle to thread given that their work appears on the team site, "After (many) years has my voice become the team's voice or is the team's voice my voice?," one in-house reporter asked. When this reporter says he presents both sides of a story, often he is responding to tough questions that come from fans.

In-house reporters seek to demonstrate their personal independence through the practices of transparency and interactivity, responding to virtually all questions from fans, although it is not clear how well that is communicated. To ensure transparency, they say they try to be clear about what they know and how they know things. The relationship they have with their audience is highly interactive, an outgrowth of being web-native outlets. All forms of reader engagement are an effort to build their own brand and, they believe, have the effect of making their outlet seem more credible. These sites have comment sections as well, where fans can have conversations beneath stories. These conversations often take on a negative tone after a loss.

Within sports, being open and taking hard questions is valorized. Players who do not hide from the press after losses are viewed positively. Writers who work for teams but face the fans on Twitter believe they are doing something similar.

A public service orientation

Journalism ethics are practical (Ward, 2011). A focus on specific practices, however, can obscure the ways in which journalists construct the importance of their field. Journalism's operationalizing of independence, truth-seeking, accountability and transparency are meant to enable it to act on behalf of the public. Sports writers have traditionally viewed themselves as the fan's representative in the locker room, getting answers from players, coaches and team executives. Finding out why the third-base coach held a runner in fourth inning or what two players who appeared to be arguing on a sideline were talking about is important to fans. Seeking those answers is a means of acting on behalf of the public.

In-house reporters seek to adapt this role. "There are times when you have to critical of players and people," one in-house reporter said. "But you can do it in a reasonable and objective way, and you're still doing your job for the fans." In-house reporters understand that their role is something the team created for its own benefit, but to reap that benefit fans must view the content they produce as honest and credible. This also points to the way they understand their audience, as fans of the team rather than the general public that a newspaper might serve. Moreover, many in-house reporters construct the audience as critical and demanding of accurate information. Fans upset about a result want to know what happened, not be talked into feeling better about it. This view of the fan audience also informs the journalistic identity of in-house reporters, who feel they must achieve certain standards. This becomes another way in-house reporters claim to be acting as journalists and negotiate their identity within the team structure.

That the audience sits so centrally within in-house reporters' self-conception shows the ways boundaries are shifting. Professionalism as an ideology seeks to allow an occupational group define itself for other stakeholders. Viewed through the lens of boundary work, a profession is actually the outcome of social shaping by a range of actors. In-house reporters perform journalistic boundary work for other media professionals and the public, adopting work practices and ethical language meant to convey credibility. As one writer put it, "I'm a new voice in a new role, I have to prove to them I'm worth their time." For in-house reporters, getting the sanction of the readers helps solidify their claim to be within the boundaries of journalism.

In-house reporters also use this idea to engage in the boundary work of expulsion. Institutional independent journalism, some argue, fails to live up to the goal of public service because the professional community constrains the way people approach their jobs.

I'm a firm believer that you should be accountable to the readership. Unfortunately, in newspapers you lose sight of that because you're held accountable to the people who run your newspaper. They worry about what the competition is doing rather than what the readership is thinking. A (local) sports blog did a pool picking the best beat writers, and they picked me for (the sport), not because I was breaking the most news, but because I was the voice of the people. I was writing about what the fans wanted to know about the team. Now my relationships are with the people buying tickets and watching on TV. ... I don't have this holier than thou belief that I'm a gatekeeper.

The same writer said elsewhere in the interview that maintaining ethical standards was important because "Otherwise you're taking yourself out of the position where you're a reliable source of information for the fans." He believes that in-house reporters are more accountable to the public than independent reporters. In some ways that is true because they understand how acutely they rely on those readers to confer credibility. An independent reporter may be working, in part, to impress his editors and colleagues as much as the readership. For those claiming a professional identity through public service, that becomes a problem.

In attempting to redefine the meaning of independence and the construction of journalistic truth, in-house reporters locate themselves within the normative role of the press. They view themselves as reporters who serve the public, even if they are operating in a constrained environment. Being part of the team limits some of what they can say publicly, although when they do speak, they do so with authority. Yet in Chapter 5, we also saw that some in-house reporters were fine with speaking to social issues, such as the place of protest within society. This could be dismissed as doing public relations, trying to support the players in a moment of controversy, although the choices writers made did not match the official positions of the team or leagues they worked within. Taking on those stories, even those who did it cursorily, did so without necessarily thinking about the brand. No one wrote a column denouncing the wearing of the shirts, but they did write in ways to inform the public about the meaning of protest generally. This coverage brought Black Lives Matter to audiences that might not have spent much time reading about it on the news pages. Sports news has never been limited to sports. All the way back in 1949 Stanley Woodward (quoted in Chapter 2) described the ways sports stories often took the form of news that would be found on other pages. Sports are social institutions, and the way they touch the rest of a community is an important topic for journalists. Independent and in-house sports pages are rightly interested in what happens on the field and who plays the games, although often to the detriment of everything else.

In describing his approach to covering the team, one reporter defined what sportswriters – both in-house and independent – do as meatball journalism. The term is borrowed from MASH's meatball surgery, a form of battlefield surgery in which doctors seek to get the patient off the table quickly, dealing with the acute issues and allowing those with more time to take on holistic issues. This reporter described this as the lot of the modern sportswriter no matter who he

works for. He is chasing information at increasingly rapid speeds, and when he finds some, he gives it a cursory treatment and gets it online and on Twitter. In-house and independent reporters do this work alongside each other.

Reporters covering the team day-to-day may be critical of specific players, executive decisions, even ownership directly. But this coverage never steps back and asks questions about the place of sports within society. Saying a team played badly is not the same as wondering whether a city should spend money on a new stadium. Reporting an injury is not the same as questioning whether football should be played in public educational institutions because of its links to brain damage. Straightforward sports coverage may take a variety of tones, but it also may reinforce teams and leagues' profitability and, at times, their claim on the public purse. In-house reporting largely reconstructs the event and feature coverage that appears on independent sports pages. Not all, however, saw their role as embedding the team in its community. The audience they serve is a fan audience, which cares about the team's fortunes. News organizations serve communities instead. A Milwaukee newspaper should focus on what Brewers are doing on the field, and what they mean within the city.

For independent reporters, one pressing question is whether they want to engage in the boundary work of expulsion toward in-house reporters. If they wish to erect boundaries between themselves and in-house reporters, they must reexamine the practices of sports journalism. Game and feature coverage has its place, but sports journalism's normative role requires independent writers to embed athletics within a broader community context. We can care about how the local baseball teams does, while also asking whether performance enhancing drugs are a problem. Feature stories can focus on how an athlete adjusted to specific challenges, but should not shy from connections to difficult societal issues like mental health, addiction, domestic violence and

the like. If the teams themselves can accomplish a portion of the inside reporting, then sports journalists' normative orientation should push them to apply external logics to their beats. The normative case for sports journalists, and boundaries they could erect against in-house media, are rooted in the idea of what Rowe (2007) calls the problem orientation.

Or perhaps sports journalism will cease to enforce boundaries at all. In the winter of 2015 the Base Ball Writers Association of America, the oldest organization of sports journalists in the country, dropped its long-held ban on mlb.com writers joining the group (Coleman, 2015). Mlb.com is distinct from the other team sites in that the writers are third-party employees, which might have made the decision easier. The writers' groups in the other three professional leagues still reject in-house writers, who are team employees, but the future of those distinctions is far from clear. Journalistic organizations certainly treat in-house writers as something different than public relations. Rich Hammond, who went to the LA Kings, now works for the Orange County Register on a range of beats. Vic Carruci left the Cleveland Browns website to become a sports columnist at his old newspaper in Buffalo (Ohio Media Watch, 2014). If journalism treats in-house position as just another reporting job, the boundaries may be opening up within the profession. If audiences accept it, then boundaries will have shifted.

Defining ethical practice

In-house reporting also exists in the same ballpark as brand publishing, a marketing technique in which businesses seek to tell the story in support of their brands using the tools of traditional storytelling media. The approach often appropriates the genre characteristics of film and journalism for use in a promotional context (Sebastian, 2014). Brand content is a catch-all category that includes its original manifestation, "brand journalism." A McDonald's marketing executive coined the term to describe the flexible storytelling conventions it used to rebrand the company in the mid-2000s (Bull, 2013). Yet the use of brand content involves direct

communication between a brand (or in this case team) and the public. The use of the term “journalism” or the use of journalism genre techniques creates specific expectations for the content being produced. Journalism ethics reflect the beliefs of a professional community about the role of the press and information within a society. When journalists approach a story they do so in a predictable way, dictated by their membership in a professional community.

Brand communicators seek to access that credibility. By acting as a publisher and adopting some of the genre characteristics, a magazine produced by Ford Motor Company shaped narratives about the meaning of car ownership and its place in national identity (Swenson, 2012, pp. 4–5). Its stories did not directly sell products as much as it told stories, usually in a journalistic tone, about being connected to Ford. “Journalists and corporate communicators both construct social narratives needed to affirm values, promote social order, and shape what it means to be members of a community, including citizens of nations, workers, and consumers of brands” (Swenson, 2012, p. 42). Brand publishing is promotional, and companies may not profit from raising important questions about corporate culture or inequality (p. 203). It seems unlikely that a brand content campaign at Ford today would take a critical look at the effects of driving. If company strategy were focused on hybrid cars, however, a brand publication might talk seriously about the effects of its previous products on the environment.

A larger question is how the appropriation of journalistic techniques into promotional content affects the perception of the storytelling conventions of news (Bird & Dardenne, 1997). Bull’s book-length treatment of brand journalism argues that ethics are embedded in the technique. Like Swenson, he distinguishes the technique from traditional journalism, stating “much of what is practiced under content marketing or brand journalism cannot be said to follow the principles of balance, impartiality and transparency” (Bull, 2013, p. 78). Its effectiveness, he

says, relies on the messages produced being recognized as journalistic. Unethical behavior in production or an insufficient commitment to truth will doom a brand journalism campaign. He also points to outright dishonest techniques like astroturfing (fake grassroots representations), and sock puppetry (pretending to be someone else) as unacceptable. Simply put, if McDonald's says it has produced a video of real customers interviewing executives, then the message must, in fact be that. This ethical stance is based on market discipline more than acting ethically.

The study of mixed-media ethics, meaning a universal approach to ethics for all communicators no matter professional status, offers a key insight here. The media system is shared by amateur and professional producers, all of whom have the ability to shape perceptions about information. Couldry (2013) argues we need "a framework of thinking that can build, at a global level, shared norms and values in relation to media practice in spite of our differences" (p. 17). He proposes three virtues for media-related practice (p. 26):

- Accuracy: Aiming for truth and actively trying to discover it
- Sincerity: Making statements that match beliefs
- Care: Taking seriously the obligation to protect common spaces for discussion.

These ethics map closely onto the cardinal ethical principles for professional journalism. Within journalism, seeking truth stands in for accuracy. Sincerity connects to independence in that the statements made by journalists correspond closely to what they know through their reporting. Minimizing harm and being accountable connect with care as a means of tending to spaces for discussion. For journalists that means an emphasis on inclusion of viewpoints and an attention to the politics of representation.

Power differentials still exist in media. Marginalization of groups by professional communicators may have effects on the ability of members of those groups to effectively participate in public processes. Mixed-media ethics as an overarching approach tends to leave

that aside. An ethical code that makes the same demands on a New York Times reporter and a solo lifestyle blogger likely ignores important distinctions.

The most important contribution from mixed-media ethics is the affirmation that in the open communication system of the digital era, everyone who shares information acquires ethical responsibilities (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). From an individual posting on 4Chan to a journalist to traditional advertisers to in-house reporters for powerful brands, all have a duty to the broader society. Yet an ethics of mixed media also collapses distinctions between actors within a media system. A general ethics of media is distinct from a professional ethics, in that occupational groups focus on differentiation. Based on the evidence of the previous chapters, ethical discourse are a means by which journalists (and those seeking to be recognized as journalists) differentiate themselves from other communicators. Ethical discourse is boundary work. Journalists have used it as such since at least World War I (Schudson, 1978). In-house reporters adapt journalism's conception of ethical practice because they want to be seen as journalists.

Mixed-media ethics set forth a general baseline for ethical responsibilities in the digital age. It adheres to the Spiderman principle; with the great power to publish information comes great responsibility. Professional ethics may speak then to special cases. Journalism's ethics guide a profession concerned with citizenship. Journalists provide the information individuals need to be self-governing and participate in the broader society. Sports are a site for the discussion of social values, a means of participating in the broader society. Sports journalism is a forum in which social definitions are formed and contested. The ethical approach journalists take to information speaks to a specific set of concerns, distinct from what might be observed on special-interest messages boards or in brand content. All play into the broader discourse,

underscoring the need for ethical practice. Journalism and other professional ethics codes then should be understood as layering in atop the general ethical stance Couldry has articulated.

In-house reporters use ethical discourse to articulate their professional identity, even if they do not explicitly frame it this way. When asked specifically about ethics, many deflected the questions, pointing to the range of ethical issues that exist in a conflict-rich sports media system. The ethical gray areas have been normalized. If the same billionaire owns a city's sports team and newspaper, can the latter do meaningful reporting on the former? It has happened before, so why would it be impossible that an in-house reporter could do the same thing?

In-house reporters also speak to journalistic values like accuracy and independence in order to their own membership in a professional community. They also point to norms of civility and transparency, which reflect care and sincerity in Couldry's framework. They even view themselves as engaged in a public service role. The in-house reporter provides information so that the fan can be fully informed about the team. This is an easier claim to make as independent media cut back on sports coverage. It is rare, however, that in-house reporters articulate why putting this information into the public domain matters, beyond audience preferences. In-house reporters are claiming a specialized role in the media system, that of the journalist. But that overall normative claim is missing from this professional definition. While they share some general themes, journalism ethics go further than mixed-media ethics.

Helping the audience toward more informed consumership could be a guiding ethical principle. Yet interview data shows that this is not something in-house reporters can fully provide. Even the most independent-minded reporters in this group of interviews – mlb.com reporters and some of the independent contractors – understand the limits on what they can report. An in-house site is not going to report information truly damaging to the team or the

league as institutions. These sites have no problems reporting on bad losses, coach firings even publically available information about ownership. It is less likely to report on legal troubles or failures of the team as a community institution like stewardship of public funds. Perhaps a few sites would allow reporters to follow up on those stories after they have been reported, but the sourcing routines ensure the in-house site would only provide the team's side of a story.

For in-house reporters, the personal authority that comes with claiming a place within journalism ethics seems to be an end in itself. Establishing that authority allows an in-house reporter to have the standing to comment in a way they believe people will take seriously. Not everyone can deliver messages with equal potency (Druckman, 2001). For people looking to maintain a professional identity as journalists, this matters a great deal personally. It also means increased likelihood that the fan audience will accept their assessments as truth rather than spin. Fans taking them seriously benefits more than the writers though.

The version of journalism in-house reporters propose gives the team more control over news about itself. In-house reporters argue that they also keeps fans stocked with higher-quality information and stronger features. And while the latter may be true, the former uses official as the definition of high-quality. And as discussed above, that is a limited way approaching information. In-house media avoid what they deem "speculative" stories. Knowing about trades that did not happen or about organizational changes that were never announced gives fans useful information for evaluating their favorite teams. Yet in-house reporters often point to these stories when attempting to engage in expulsion. The contradiction here is that wresting control of information from the team somehow results in a less journalistic product. This is not to say the information is meaningless, or even necessarily untrustworthy. It is just limited. Some high-quality information is far from official. In seeking to redefine some core journalistic ethics, in-

house reporters address them in isolation rather than treating them as ways of adhering to an overarching normative framework. When articulated by in-house reporters, accuracy and independence are about asserting an individual identity. They do not necessarily connect with the journalistic values of an informed citizenry (or even fan base).

Journalism ethics are practical, but they are more than practices. In-house reporting shows how practices meant to convey ethical reporting can be detached from journalism and used to serve other purposes. Journalism ethics codes are one way of answering the question, what does society need from its news? In-house media sports media is less concerned with society's needs and more concerned with the team's. The in-house reporter defines his audience as fans, and seeks to give them access to the team more directly. This is a commercial mission couched in journalistic terms. And while privately owned newspapers produce journalism for commercial ends, the sales pitch is different. And institutional journalism's failure to deliver on that deal has cost it a jurisdiction.

Ethical boundaries then should not be viewed through the lens of practice or individual ethics, but rather on an overall normative orientation. Sports reporting matters because it contains a discussion of societal values. Independent sports reporting's failures to do so likely created the conditions that allowed in-house reporters to be able to claim to be doing the same job. But it does so sometimes, occasionally taking on stories that go beyond the field or embed teams in their broader contexts. The New York *Times*' work on head injuries in football has done this. Online sports journalism that take up social issues as they manifest in sports so this as well. As in-house media expands, increasingly this sort of work will differentiate independent media from in-house work.

In fact, if a meaningful boundary between in-house and independent sports reporting will continue to exist, the latter must examine its own ethical orientation. Sports journalists' traditionally have understood their jurisdiction as making the insular world of sports more transparent to the public; reporting from the inside for the public. Commercial imperatives make this an important part of the work. But just as listicles support strong journalism at an outlet like BuzzFeed, ideally traditional coverage would support sports journalism that embeds sports within the broader society. Sports journalism should view teams as the civic, cultural and economic institutions they are. It should examine the way events within athletics dramatize key social issues or serve as an entry point to societal level discussions on issues of race, gender, crime, domestic violence, childhood development community investment, economics and others. If the boundaries of sports journalism shift to separate the world of sports from society generally, then the journalistic character of sports reporting will no longer be particularly important.

For in-house sports reporting, failing to define a truly service-based missions still means the tenets of mixed-media ethics laid out by Couldry should apply. In-house reporters should strive to provide accurate representations to the extent possible. Sincerity requires the in-house reporter to reflect and point out when an accurate report is not possible. It also means reporting what she knows to be correct rather than simply reprinting team-provided perspectives. In effect, this requires tending to the boundary between in-house reporting and public relations in a serious way. Care represents maintaining an inclusive voice and using civility in their interactions with the public. Through their interactions with fans, in-house reporters have the ability to convene community and engage in debate without veering into negative behaviors such as insults. Those are more common in sports media than they should be, as the in-house reporters' use of civility as an important professional approach. Journalism's ethical standards have shifted to reflect

changing understandings of the role of the profession within society. Ethics codes lay out the ways journalists make a claim for their jurisdiction over news. When embedded in a media system, professionals use ethical discourse to draw occupational boundaries and define roles and expectations.

In-house reporters use ethical language to engage in their own version of boundary work, attempting to open up journalism to include themselves. The evidence in this dissertation shows the ways they detach specific practices that connote journalism ethics from a larger normative orientation. Focusing on practices may distract from the actual ethical viewpoint. Journalists and ethicists may debate the practice of using unnamed sources, but a blanket rule against them likely would prevent a journalist from providing important information that can only be obtained that way. In-house reporters emphasize the ethic of accuracy, while at the same time putting the team in charge of what counts as accurate. Getting information right is an ethical responsibility for journalists, but a journalism in which only officially confirmed information is correct is one in which journalists can never challenge institutional actors. That this is possible illustrates the importance of connecting practice to principle. In-house reporters sever that link.

In-house reporters use ethical discourse to make a case for their own professional status, but then transfer that authority to the team's website. What they argue for is a restoration of the pre-digital era map of control over information, one in which sporting organizations and institutional media shared control over information. In-house media's boundary work calls to mind nostalgia for a period of greater institutional control, even performing a version of journalism that views those strictures as more ethical than the alternatives. This boundary work seeks to minimize the systemic rupture in-house media represents by casting itself as more traditional than the traditional media. In-house reporters position themselves as serving the

public rather than the teams they work for, and serving as a credible, if not impartial source of information. Yet the general reticence to engage beyond the field troubles this claim. Some in-house reporters did take on the Black Lives Matter story, but they did so in ways that minimized the challenges being posed by athletes engaging in protest. Journalists ideally represent their communities. In-house media represents the team. The phrase “stick to sports” is often uttered on Twitter when a sports writer takes up an issue that goes beyond the field. In-house media seeks to do essentially that, and in articulating journalistic identity, they seek to move the profession away from issues that could trouble team brands. Certainly teams are within their rights to do that. For sports journalists, it is difficult to see how this does not devalue the profession.

Conclusion

Boundary work provides a useful lens for analyzing changes in professional identity against the backdrop of evolving social and technological conditions. Professions exist in the context of a society. It fulfills a societal function, and therefore is affected by changes to the social environment. Yet the study of boundary work is about more than the interplay of occupational groups. It is about authority. Journalism acted as an exclusive source of information about current events in the pre-digital era. But journalism’s jurisdiction represented a broader epistemology, in which members of the profession determined what counted as true for the broader society. Other professional groups and the public accepted journalism’s jurisdictional claims and addressed their own efforts to communicate to the public to the profession’s routines and norms. A societal information network with journalism at the center is a social structure.

Control over information supported specific structures of authority. Shifts in that network affect professional categories and reconfigure the authority those groups project. The study of journalism boundary work broadly examines how a professional group with its autonomy under threat attempts to reconstitute its own place in society. This dissertation takes up this question

from the other direction, describing how a group uses the shifting boundaries of journalism to try to claim a place within the profession. This project examines the dimensions of this open contest for authority, the outcome of which will have major effects on societal definition of truth.

The pre-digital model of sports media that figured so centrally in Chapter 1 reflects an era of one-way communication, with its incumbent institutional control over messages (Wenner, 1989). Sports journalists in that model represented a central node for messages, connecting institutional actors like media companies and sports organizations with their audiences. This model was incomplete in that it left out a range of actors such as sponsors, but it did describe the professional position of the sports journalist. This structure of this network put a few actors in charge of shaping messages, giving sports organizations and journalists a significant control over how society understood sports, a key social institution.

The influx of new communicative actors has changed this system. The expansion of the ability to communicate on a mass scale has loosened professional control over information, and by extension scrambled the lines authority that characterized the previous era. The loss of jurisdiction over news was bad for journalism as a profession. But it also cost sports organizations control over information. Since at least the 1920s, they used the techniques of public relations to shape messages about themselves that would be delivered by journalists. This was a mutually beneficial relationship. The deployment of in-house reporting reflects a strategy on the part of the sports organizations to regain some of that control. They can use in-house reporters to exert more influence on information in the sports media system.

Yet the crowded media system means the in-house reporter must use the tools at his disposal to achieve legitimacy with the audience. In-house reporters, like independent reporters, are in the position of seeking to justify themselves to the public. As Chapter 2 showed, questions

about the place of sports journalism within the larger profession have helped in-house reporters claim a foothold. The less-than-adversarial practices of independent sports media led to genre conventions that could be easily transplanted to the in-house context. The ethical shortcomings journalists have long complained about among their colleagues in the “toy department,” gave in-house reporters the tools to articulate a journalistic identity that connects to the norms of the profession. Journalism may have lost its exclusive jurisdiction over information, but it still commands more respect than a press release.

The first research question in this dissertation asked how writers found their way to in-house sites and saw themselves fitting into the corporate structure of sports entities and the media system as a whole. Chapter 3 showed how in-house writers claimed to be engaged in journalism. Many in-house reporters had moved over from independent journalism, and most said they brought their professional identities with them. They supported this by stressing the similarities of their work with that of the newspaper beat writer. They also described their relationships with other actors in the media system, as a means of defining themselves as closest to the journalists. They also feel described operating at arm’s length from the team or league entity that employs them. By injecting journalistic practices into sports organizations and maintaining a boundary with the public relations staff, they seek to assert autonomy over their professional lives.

The second research question asked whether in-house reporters view themselves as journalists. The answer, broadly, is they did view themselves as journalists or else close enough that the distinctions were minor. This led quickly to the third research question, which asked how they defined journalism so it could include them. One way was by underlining the similarities in job practices between themselves and independent journalists (Chapter 3). Another was the

deployment of ethical discourse. In-house reporters say they adhere to the ethics of seeking truth and acting independently, although they had to adapt those ethics to the in-house context. They say they provide entirely accurate information about the team they cover, arguing that their commitment to truth is even stronger than independent reporters, who they say are more likely to publish speculative information. In the case of independence, they say the work they produce reflects their own reporting and not the team's position. They are free to tell the truth, even when it reflects badly on the team. They do this both in their stories and on social media when they interact with fans.

Yet the interviews also uncovered the ways in-house reporters' practices limit the applicability of these ethical claims. First, in-house reporters treat true and official as synonyms. The team controls what information is reportable for an in-house reporter by choosing what to confirm and not to confirm. Plenty of true stories go unconfirmed for strategic reasons. Meanwhile, in-house reporters (with the exception of mlb.com writers) generally use a team-only source pool. They are free to report honestly, but they only gather information from sources within the team. Most notably, they do not talk to player agents, who are the primary sources of breaking news for independent reporters, especially about player unrest or contract terms. In-house reporters often construct routines around avoiding information they would not want to know, which would trouble their claims to be journalists.

The fourth research question asked how this identity was operationalized in breaking news situations. When it came to breaking news like trades, signings and firings, in-house reporters used their orientation toward officialdom to guide their actions. Team confirmation defines a piece of breaking news as true, which means that in-house reporters are unlikely to break news. Most do not as a matter of policy. For those few who do have a green light to break

news (mlb.com and some team site writers) they still feel constrained by the extra pressure of having their work appear on a team site. Waiting can be the safer, and, in their view more ethical, course of action.

When faced with the introduction of social issues into sports coverage, in-house reporters largely draw on their conceptions of independence to explain their choices. In response to athletes participating in 2014's Black Lives Matter protests, in-house reporters said they made the choices about whether to cover the story. They positioned their news judgement as a form of independence. And indeed, their decisions did not always reflect those of team management, who responded to the protest actions in a variety of ways. Yet a story like that reveals the indeterminate status in-house reporters have in the sports media system. Acts of protest are unexpected, but an in-house reporter serves an interest-bounded audience not a community-bounded one. Do Cleveland Cavaliers fans in Germany care about Lebron James' acts of protest? Does embedding the team in an American locality serve or detract from worldwide marketing goals (which themselves may not be aligned). It is unclear how engaging with these issues helps or hurts the team brand.

The fifth research question asked how this use of ethical discourse connected to the boundary work in-house reporters engage in. As I argued in this chapter, ethical codes have long been a means by which journalists have defined who belongs in the profession. In appealing to the ethics of truth and independence, in-house reporters are acting to embed themselves in the profession. Yet in examining how they operationalize these journalism ethics, it is clear they are using them in ways that do not connect to the normative orientation of the profession. Journalism seeks to provide the information the public needs to be self-governing and participate fully in community life. That may take different forms in sports media, but it remains at the bottom of

any account of journalism. In-house reporters express the idea that their work serves the public, but in practice they appear to work on behalf of the team. The use of journalism ethics to claim credibility for themselves may prove individual reporters with professional respect. But at the same time, it has the effect of making the team's website more authoritative. Given that the news content on the team site is generated entirely through team-centric processes, this serves the institution more than the public.

This dissertation opened with a discussion of the connection between sports and culture. The conditions behind the production of sports media texts matters because sports serve as a lens through which a society understands itself. Issues of race, gender, economics, community values, child development and other are made visible through news coverage. Sports belongs in the realm of journalism because it represents a place where a society negotiates its identity and values. Sports journalists may have failed to live up to this responsibility. Indeed, the ethical lapses in sports journalism coupled with technological changes are what opened up space for in-house media to perform their own version of the profession.

As it has been practiced here, it gives sports organizations greater power to shape the context of our games. At the very least, it puts team employees on a similar footing as journalists on a similar footing in making sense of the place of sports in a society. Sports organizations have always exerted influence over how they are covered and authored their own messages. But the displacement of the independent media gives them an opportunity to exert greater control. Moreover, it remakes the definition of journalism in ways that make it less able to contest institutional power. It moves authority over information to the sports organizations.

A successful model of in-house journalism developed in sports likely will not stay in sports exclusively. Sports has often been a testing ground for new practices (Oates & Pauly,

2007). The journalism of the 20th century distinguished itself through boundary work after WWI, using differences between itself and the nascent publicity industry to claim a jurisdiction. Yet it is clear today that this jurisdiction was in part technologically determined. As soon as it was cost effective for strategic actors to begin communicating on a mass scale, they did so. Politicians, brands including sports teams and many others now communicate through message channels they control. This occurs in concert with legacy media right now. Independent voices act as a check on how far in-house media can go to shape messages.

But emerging preferences for partisan news suggest that “friendlier” news sources have value for audiences. Sports fandom has been viewed as analogous to political partisanship. Would a political party with an in-house reporter be able to achieve the same sort of credibility (Some might say this is what Fox News and MSNBC already do)? Even if we reject in-house media’s claim that it is engaged in journalism, its place as an institutional communicator does make it important place in-house media and brand content in an ethical framework. This project proposes extending Couldry’s framework of accuracy, sincerity and care to these writers and other producers of brand content. The ethics of mixed-media provide a general framework for all those communicating in the newly open media system to adhere to. Professional codes based on specific social roles should accompany them; journalism ethics remain an important source of differentiation. But in-house media have responsibilities beyond selling products. They are contributing to the larger cultural conversation. They have ethical duties as well.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

1. Name
2. Title
3. Organizational Affiliation
4. How would you describe your current job?
5. What are your responsibilities with your current job? What is the title of the person to whom you directly report (please do not provide any name)? What is that person's background (again, descriptions only, not identifiable information)?
6. How long have you been in the field of journalism?
7. What prior jobs or positions have you held as a journalist?
8. What drew you to work directly for a sports organization? What journalistic factors affected your decision? What non-journalistic factors affected your decision?
9. Consider the similarities between your work in a news organization and your current work. Please describe three to five similarities you consider most important.
10. Consider the differences between your work in a news organization and your current work. Please describe three to five differences you consider most important.
11. How present, if at all, is the sense of competition between sports organizations and the journalists who cover their team?
12. How do you decide what to write about? Who else has influence in that decision and how?
13. Please describe your interaction with sources now versus when you worked for a news organization. How are those interactions similar? Different?
14. Journalists are often described as "gatekeepers," receiving a great deal of information but only publishing that which is most important for the audience. In your direct experience in sports, how have digital and social media affected this gatekeeping function? How have those changes been positive? Negative?
15. Consider the commonly held ethic that journalists should avoid conflicts of interest. In your direct experience, how did that ethic play out when you were employed in a newsroom? How does it play out in your current position?
16. Consider the commonly held ethic that journalists should be independent from the people and issues they cover. In your direct experience, how did that ethic play out when you were employed in a newsroom? How does it play out in your current position?
17. Consider the commonly held ethic that journalists should be transparent with their audience. In your direct experience, how did that ethic play out when you were employed in a newsroom? How does it play out in your current position?
18. Are there any other ethics you deem important in sports communication that we should cover?
19. In a few sentences, describe your general evaluation of ethics in sports journalism.
20. If you had to label your current work, would you characterize it as "journalism," "public relations" or some other term. Why do you say that?
21. What are the differences between your current work and the work of reporters in news organizations covering your team or league?
22. Do you feel constrained in any way about what you cover or how? If so, how? How important is this to you? How does this compare to any constraints you felt working in a newsroom?

23. Consider recent debates about news organization access to athletes, coaches and management and reporting on practices, injuries, labor disputes, etc., with some teams limiting access and constraining use of social media. How do these concerns factor into your work?
24. If you were to consult two people about an ethical question in journalism, who would they be (please provide a position and description, rather than a name)?
25. Anything you would like to add?