

THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF SPANISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALISTS IN ONE  
NEWSPAPER IN THE U.S. SOUTH: A CASE STUDY

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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NEWSPAPER IN THE U.S. SOUTH: A CASE STUDY

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

*To my mother.*

This work is also dedicated to my husband, who has supported me from the beginning of this Master's program, and more importantly at the end, when working on my thesis meant time away from him and our children.

To my children, who inspire me to improve myself every day. I hope to show them that learning is a lifetime endeavor.

To the friends who housed and fed me while doing research, and those who listened to me talk about this project for too long, and whom, with their own academic accomplishments, pushed me to continue. And to Dr. Charles and Sharon Reagan, for their enthusiasm about this project.

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## ABSTRACT

The overall goal of this study was to learn about the function that Spanish-language journalists in the U.S. want to perform. The study adds to a limited body of research on Spanish-language media in the U.S., and an even more limited body of research on Spanish-language journalists.

Interviews with two journalists in a metropolitan city in the South of the United States, observation of four editorial meetings and a text analysis of the publication's stories during a four month period indicated that these journalists believe they do a service to a sector of the Hispanic community, the recently arrived immigrants, to help them assimilate into the U.S. These journalists consider their publication a 'navigation guide.'

The study offered support for the theory of agenda building, as these journalists are choosing stories that will help new immigrants assimilate into U.S. culture. Changes in immigration patterns and law, however, are changing the types of subjects and stories these journalists cover, while also changing their own profile as journalists.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This study presents a case study of the process that Spanish-language journalists go through to craft the content for their newspapers. Spanish-language media have existed in North America ever since Spanish-speakers arrived on the continent. In addition, talk about immigration to the United States in the pages of Spanish-language media is not new either. However, today with the U.S. Hispanic population at 16.4 percent, and of those 46.7 percent being foreign-born, according to the American Community Survey Estimates (2008-2012), it is important to know more about the acculturation and assimilation process of Hispanic immigrants.

Researchers have theorized about how immigrants find ways to operate in their new environment. Boski describes five different meanings of integration; full integration, integration as a merger of two cultures, partial integration, bicultural competence and marginalization (2008). We cannot assume that all immigrants would aspire to live in the U.S. under any of these concepts of integration, but researchers suggest that within the Hispanic community there are individuals at each one of these levels of integration. It is thought that the three middle concepts, which to different levels allow for taking part of the culture in the U.S. while still keeping some level of their culture of origin, may be the most common. This is similar to what Subervi- Velez (2008) describes as the “reality” of Hispanics in the U.S. as one of acculturation and pluralism, where individuals take on traits

from their new country, while maintaining interest and connections with their native culture:

“Thus, even when pursuing “The American Dream,” most Latinos adapting to the dominant United States society, are not totally disinterested in political, social, economic, or cultural issues that relate to their ethnic community, however that is defined.” (p. 53)

While it can be argued that media can play an important role in the lives of all who consume it, and research shows that Spanish-language newspapers have played different roles in immigrants' lives through U.S. History (Cortés, 1987; Rodriguez 1998), there is still limited research addressing how and why Spanish-language journalists choose to cover certain stories. The goal of this study was to explore if journalists working at Spanish-language newspapers attempted to help their readers by showing them how to live in the United States. Immigration, according to Bourhis, Moise, Perreault and Senecal (1997), implies that the group migrating adapts to its new culture, as the host culture also adapts to them. It is important to note that according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) an *immigrant* is a "person who comes into a country to take up permanent residency." This seems to be the most appropriate definition for the term immigrant in this study, as only someone who comes into the country with the purpose of staying long-term would need direction to better learn the culture.

*Acculturation* is a term used by anthropologists describing the



change that happens when two groups come in contact with each other, while psychological acculturation is what an individual experiences when his cultural group is going through acculturation (Bourhis et al., 1997). According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014), *acculturation* is the “cultural modification of an individual, group or people by adapting or borrowing traits from another culture,” and *assimilation* is the process of absorbing into the culture of a population or group.

“As with the pluralism and civic ideologies, the assimilation ideology also includes the expectation that immigrants adopt the public values of the host country”(Bourhis et al., 1997, p. 374)

While Bourhis et al., describe the immigrant's experience as psychological acculturation, in this case study, the researcher will use the term acculturation to describe the immigrants' experience as described by Boski (2008). The three middle levels of integration he described, bicultural competence, integration as a function of specialization, and integration as a cognitive-evaluative merger of two cultural sets could be experienced by the same person depending on the years spent in the U.S. and the person's experiences. This is similar to the questions posed by Ward (2008) about how acculturation happens, in her review of John Berry's acculturation theories. Her findings reveal that family life, perception of discrimination, and contact with the host culture all influence an individual's acculturation (Ward, 2008).

Boski's three middle levels of integration, which allows the individual

to participate in both cultures at different levels make the most sense to use for this case study as the individual who is fully integrated would have little interest in Spanish-language newspapers, and the individual who stays marginalized would not have interest in stories about the host country and may rather read his native country's newspapers.

In learning part of the U.S. culture, one also learns that there are labels used to describe individuals who come from Spanish-speaking countries to the U.S. People from different countries in Latin America are lumped together into a single community of Hispanics/Latinos<sup>1</sup>. Those with very different cultures, such as Argentinians and Guatemalans, and different immigration experiences like Puerto Ricans (who are legal U.S. Residents) and Mexicans are all considered Hispanics upon arrival into the U.S. This is the concept of *Latinidad*, explained by Hatcher (2005) and Dávila (2000) which gives U.S. Hispanics a unified identity regardless of their country of origin

While immigrants from Latin America must learn how others see them in the U.S. and how to live in their new country, the role of Spanish-language media in this process can also be important tool for immigrants' acculturation. Spanish-language journalists and their journalistic process can help the established U.S. community of advertisers, government agencies and publishers determine if using their newspapers to relay important information through advertisements, press releases or notices is

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<sup>1</sup> In examining existing research, the author has found the terms Hispanic and Latino used interchangeably. Although the U.S. Census Bureau and the Pew Center for Research Hispanic Trends Project do not seem to have a preference, the author chooses to use Hispanic in this study because according to a 2008 Pew Center for Research survey, slightly more Hispanic/Latinos preferred the term "Hispanic".

a worthy investment. According to the American Community Survey 2013 1-year estimates 13 percent of the U.S. population speak Spanish at home, with more than 42 percent of those speaking English, less than very well. A vital question to investigate then becomes, how and where are Hispanics getting their news?

This study used data from interviews, observation and textual analysis, and applied the theoretical frameworks of agenda-building and agenda-setting to understand how journalists at Spanish-language newspapers compose their articles and enact their role in the community and through their roles as Spanish-language journalist. More specifically, the purpose of this case study was to discover if a Spanish-language newspaper in the southern U.S. served a didactic role for its immigrant community. For the purposes of this research, didactic meant that the news staff intentionally created the majority of the content in its pages in a way that is geared towards helping immigrants navigate life in a new country.

For the insight to be meaningful the research was focused on just one editorial team, using three qualitative methods; observation, face-to-face interviews and textual analysis. The investigation took the form of a case study and employed the use of in-depth interviews with two Spanish-language journalists and an analysis of news content at one Spanish-language newspaper based in a major metropolitan area in the south of the United States.

The text analysis focused on the news section of the paper, and purposely excluded the entertainment and sports sections. This was done

because it can be assumed that the news sections, which are dedicated to current affairs and local news, are designed to inform; the other sections focus on entertainment and other soft news that contributes less to the political and social acculturation of the reader.

This research will also open the doors to further research in Hispanic media, giving future researchers another resource for studying ethnic media. While the U.S. Hispanic community is growing, research on Hispanic newspapers and media studies is still limited. A review of the literature identified some studies about media content, including those by Branton and Dunaway (2008) and Ghanem and Wanta (2001), and some about Hispanic journalists, such as Correa and Rodriguez (2008), but no research that looked at the relationship between Spanish-language journalists and the creation of content. In this study the author aims to bridge a gap in the current literature.

While limited to one Spanish-language newspaper, this study gives media scholars a current starting point to understand how the changing audience demographic may change and how the role immigrant media must serve immigrants and Spanish-language U.S. communities in order to make the acculturation process easier for both the immigrant and the native U.S. population.

Theoretically, the research will also contribute to a theoretical understanding of the agenda-setting and agenda-building processes of the Spanish-language media.

The following chapters provide a thorough background of the study

of ethnic media in the United States and the current Spanish-language media research, as well as the qualitative methods used to conduct and validate this research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Spanish-Language Press**

When going through the process of assignment of stories, journalists have a substantial role in determining what is important to the reader and how important it is within the rest of the issues of the day (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.1). For Spanish-language journalists, story assignment is no different.

In the introduction of his book *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, Robert E. Park writes:

“The immigrant press is interesting from many points of view, but mainly from the light which its history and its contents throw upon the inner life of immigrant peoples and their efforts to adjust themselves to a new cultural environment.”(Park, 1912, p. XIX)

In his book Park identifies several roles of the immigrant press; from a way to preserve a language and culture that was threatened in the old country, to a means to communicate with people from the same culture, to entertainment and even to fight assimilation. He argues that for the poor and often uneducated immigrants, newspapers served as a way to learn—both about their home country and their new home.

“Here for the first time, with few exceptions, the European peasants find newspapers written about things that interest them, in the languages they speak. Here for the

first time the reading habit is established among them. The newspaper brings them into contact with the current thought and the current events of their community, primarily the race group, with its interests merging on one side into the homeland and on the other into the larger American community.”(Park, 1912, p.79)

Editors of foreign press, Park argues, at first tried to bring erudite language and discussion to the newspapers, soon realizing that their readers did not understand articles written in the newspapers they paid for. Readers, it seems, were more interested in the type of content found in American papers– police reports, community events, gossip– than the intellectual discussion of the higher classes.

As an immigrant press entrepreneur, Louis N. Hammerling, worked on giving immigrants a road map to life in their new country, (Hudson, Boyajy, 2009). With his organization, the American Association of Foreign Language Newspapers, and influence on close to 800 newspapers published in 33 different languages during the late 1910s. he had a lot of say about what was communicated to newer immigrants.

As journalism, public relations and advertising emerged as professions, he worked hard to solicit advertising and news copy for foreign-language newspapers when those periodicals served as “textbooks for citizenship” (Hudson, Boyajy, 2009, p. 298)

While Carlos Cortés (1987) argues that the Chicano, Mexican-American, press cannot be considered immigrant press because Mexican

Americans were in what today is U.S. soil. before the country even existed. "first entered U.S. history via annexation" (Miller, 1987), his analysis of Chicano press is in many ways linked to current-day Spanish-language press, as currently close to 65 percent of the Hispanic population of the U.S. is of Mexican origin (Pew Research, Hispanic Trends Project, 2010). According to Cortés (1987), during the 19th century the Chicano press featured a varied content, including articles to teach readers, "sometimes didactic articles, including moral instruction."

According to records, the first Spanish-language newspaper in the United States was published in New Orleans in 1808 under the name *El Misisipí* (Rodriguez, 1998). Cortés identified several newspapers in northern Mexico, which would later become the U.S., starting in 1810 and going well into the 20th century.

According to Rodriguez (1998), *El Misisipí* was a bilingual publication (English-Spanish) with news and advertising content aimed at merchants doing business with nations in the Caribbean and Latin America. In the late 1840s the Southwestern states, including Arizona, California, Texas and New Mexico, witnessed the publishing of many Hispanic newspapers, some of them affiliated with government agencies in the U.S. and Mexico, not all of them written in Spanish. California had a government-subsidized newspaper that served as a means to communicate laws to new residents in their native tongue, Spanish (Rodriguez, 1998).

Toward the end of the 20th century ethnic media, meaning the



collection of media outlets that service immigrant communities in the U.S., became more prominent (Deuze, 2005). In 1920 Park identified 31 ethnic newspapers in the city of New York alone, including newspapers in Spanish, Persian and Slovenian. Chicano newspapers also had an important presence in areas with strong Mexican-American communities, including Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California (Cortés, 1987, p. 249).

Research shows that U.S. Hispanic and Spanish-language newspapers have had different missions for being, including wanting to be teacher, advocate and unifier of the group. Some authors have identified even more roles; Johnson (2000), for example, identifies four assimilation functions and five pluralistic functions in Hispanic magazines. However, this author will base research in the three basic functions; teacher, advocate and unifier.

In the case of Chicano press, Cortes argues that in addition to the three main roles they provide –control, activism and reflection– they fill another three roles.

“They have been preservers and transmitters of Chicano history and culture, maintainers and reinforces of language, and strengtheners of Chicano pride.”(Cortes, 1987, p. 254)

In the 19th century there were also other newspapers that advocated for the well-being of Mexicans. These newspapers were independent from government agencies, however they were mostly affiliated with advocacy groups, such as unions (Rodriguez, 1998). In a

thorough survey of Spanish-language newspapers in the U.S. in the mid 1900s, Robert Brand (1945) identifies 160 Spanish-language newspapers, and describes most of them as having some kind of agenda; whether it was the communist, pro-labor articles published in the Traducción-Prensa of Tampa which catered to the Cuban cigar workers and published translated articles from the Information Bulletin from the USSR Embassy, or Liberación, a New York paper for the Puerto Rican, nationalist residents of the city (Brand, 1945).

In the late 1970s, Felix Gutierrez of the University of Southern California Annenberg testified before the court to advocate for mandatory Spanish-language telephone service. In his testimony Gutierrez said that Spanish-language media in the Los Angeles area were not just a way to reinforce the traditional language, but also a means to help immigrants assimilate into the *barrio* and beyond, including political activity, consumer behavior and social norms. He called it the 'American Way of Life' (Gutierrez, 1985, p.122)

Today, Spanish-language newspapers print stories that inform readers of what is happening in their community, such as social events, (Correa & Rodriguez, 2008) and perhaps most importantly they take on the role of advocates for the Hispanic and immigrant community, including covering stories about immigration from the point of view of the immigrant, and promoting the Hispanic vote, even if many of their readers cannot vote themselves.

This role was palpable in the Spring of 2006 when many Spanish-

language media outlets promoted the participation of Hispanics in the immigration rallies, and in some cases called them to the economic boycott of May 1st (Shore, 2006). The then Spanish-language radio personality, Piolín, called for Hispanics to participate in the boycott, while the Los Angeles-based paper *La Opinión* offered different ways to participate in the May 1st events that would not risk people's jobs, such as speaking about immigration issues at school or work (Shore, 2006). This is not new. Historically, the Hispanic immigrant press has focused on the rights of immigrants, argues Nicolás Kannelos (2007), many of the old newspapers printed their views for immigrant rights on their masthead, and published articles against racism and discrimination. Therefore the first research question of this study is;

RQ1: What role do journalists in this Spanish-language newspaper in the U.S. South want to fulfill for their readers?

### **The Theory of Agenda-Setting**

First developed in 1972 by McCombs and Shaw, the theory of agenda-setting argues that audiences are influenced by the content of the media, and its consequence "the transmission of object and attribute salience from the press to the public about issues, political figures and other topics" (McCombs, 2005, p. 549). According to McQuail, agenda-setting is that "the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues" (McQuail 2009, p.513). In their 1972 study of political news, McCombs and Shaw used presidential election coverage and its effect on

audience attitudes and found that there is a strong relation between the issues covered by the news, and the issues that audiences felt were most important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In the case of Spanish-language newspapers that are geared towards new immigrants this may translate into journalists giving their audiences stories that will be helpful in their new lives, in essence giving them a road map to life in the U.S. pointing out, through story selection, the cultural and social values that are important to a successful American life, as well as a means to retain their culture, and fight for their rights.

The agenda-setting effect has been studied in Spanish-language media. A 2001 study by Ghanem and Wanta found that Spanish speakers in McAllen, Texas who watched Spanish-language cable news showed a higher agenda-setting effect than English speakers watching English-language cable news. They argued that this was perhaps due to the lack of diversity in the number of available news sources compared to their English-speaking counterparts.

Branton and Dunaway (2008) found Spanish-language newspapers are much more likely to cover Hispanic immigration stories, and much less likely to focus on the negative side of immigration than their English-language counterparts. This difference in immigration coverage between Spanish and English-language newspapers, the former being more positive than the latter, may be the reason, along with the lived experience of Hispanics, behind the different attitudes among Anglos and Hispanics about immigration, (Branton & Dunaway 2008).

It is important to note that Villar and Bueno-Olson (2013), argue that it is not the author's language or ethnicity that makes a difference in topics covered by a newspaper, but the "identity and mission of a newspaper" (p. 66)

With this in mind, we could argue that journalists do take part in agenda setting by selecting stories that they deem important for their readers.

### **The Theory of Agenda Building**

Before we can argue that news content affects its audiences it is important to look at how journalists choose stories to cover for the paper, and if journalists are purposely giving recent immigrants a road map to life in the United States.

Correa and Rodriguez (2008) found that Spanish-language newspaper staff can be divided in two kinds of people: journalists from Latin America who have studied and often worked in their home countries as journalists, and U.S.-born Hispanics who have maintained the language skills of their parents. In many ways their lives are similar to the lives of their audience, and could possibly give other immigrants advice based on their own experience, not just as journalists but as immigrants themselves.

Although it is not as researched as agenda-setting, the theory of agenda-building may be more helpful in understanding the story selection process of Spanish-language journalists, as agenda-building looks at the relationship between news sources and media outlets. (Berkowitz & Adams 1990, p. 723)

In their study of the 1982 city council meetings in Bloomington, Indiana, Weaver and Elliott found that while journalists have an impact on the amount of coverage of certain issues, they act as transmitters and judges of newsworthiness, rather than as creators of issues (1985).

There are several influencers in the journalist's selection of stories, including not-for profit organizations, such as universities, other news outlets, audiences and even themselves. In a national survey of health journalists, journalists reported that public relations sources are less important in the story selection process (Len-Ríos, Hinnant, Park, Cameron, Frisby & Lee, 2009). Their study found that audiences and the journalists' interests had a lot of weight in the story selection, which the researchers argue may be due to the nature of the subject. Len-Ríos et. al. argue that health information is an "experience good," which this author finds also of immigration. Specific cultural traditions and expectations of life in the United States, and other type of information usually covered in Spanish-language newspapers have to be lived to be understood and accepted.

One of the major factors in journalists including public relations materials, such as news subsidies in their budgets is whether the information is localized (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990).

Spanish-language journalists choose stories to cover, either the ones presented through advisories and press releases, stories they find while they are out covering other stories, or stories they think of on their own as being important. From the many ways they find these stories, they

must decide which ones will be of interest to their readership. Therefore:

RQ2: How do Spanish-language journalists in this newspaper in the U.S.

South think they are serving the community they cover?

### **Serving the community**

Two early 20th century Hispanic newspapers are still in publication today. *La Opinión* was published for the first time in Los Angeles in 1914, *La Prensa*, 1917, was published in San Antonio. The publisher, Mexican businessman Ignacio Lozano, wanted to give a service to his readers, and educate Mexicans (Rodriguez, 1998). There have been some studies about the roles of these newspapers in the immigrant populations. Siblani and Siblani argue that ethnic press provides a means to acculturation:

“People often arrive in this country with no idea of how American society works. Standing in line at the bank or post office? No double parking on main streets? No honking the horn at 2 a.m.? You have to be kidding. Gentle and sometimes not-so-gentle coaching is needed.” (2007, p.31)

The ethnic press often serves people who have the same ethnic background but are at different levels of immigration. Across the country Hispanic newspapers serve two different kinds of Hispanics; the recent immigrant, and the second –or third– generation Hispanic-American (Correa & Rodriguez, 2008). This makes Siblani and Siblani's observation true only for recent immigrants.

Some researchers argue that it is the older generation Hispanics that are more interested in ethnic press (Shoemaker, Reese & Danielson,

1985). However, according to their research as time goes by, U.S. Hispanics become more acculturated and have a lesser need, or want, for Spanish-language newspapers. While some publications have become bilingual or English-language, others have remained exclusively Spanish-language. In general this has never been an issue for publishers because the flow of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries has been steady, allowing Spanish-language newspapers to have new audiences regularly (Kanellos, 2007).

In addition, Shoemaker, Reese and Danielson argue that it is possible that a trend reversal happens and revives interest of Hispanic culture among young U.S.-born Hispanics, which would increase their interest in ethnic press, making it relevant for the recent immigrants and acculturated Hispanics. This may be what John Hatcher found in his research. Hatcher (2005) argues that the acculturation mission of ethnic newspapers is overstated, and rather this press works as a way to create a community among people of similar backgrounds. Johnson (2000) suggests that although the ethnic media does not create an ethnic community, it does help maintain and promote the notion of community within the ethnic group, which is consistent with Park's assessment of ethnic press.

An example of this is The Miami Herald's coverage of immigration in the 1960's. According to Gavrilos (2004), the Herald created a Hispanic community that did not exist in Miami beforehand.

The Miami Herald's role in making the immigration of Cuban



*Marielitos* to seem as a threat and invasion of Miami gave pro-English supporters room to strengthen their position to protect the community and its culture and practices through affirming of English as its only language.

The outrage over what seemed like anti-Cuban coverage, as well as the anti-Spanish ordinance of Dade County ended up in the creation of *El Nuevo Herald*, a Spanish-language version of the *The Miami Herald* that had an independent editorial board and an anti-Castro editorial policy. (Gavrilos, 2004)

Whatever the mission of Spanish-language newspapers, it is important to know what the intent of Spanish-language journalists is during the process of story selection. The way they choose stories may be telling of the type of role journalists in Spanish-language media see themselves playing. Therefore:

RQ3: How do Spanish-language journalists in this southern U.S. newspaper choose stories to cover?

### **Today's Spanish-language press**

There are hundreds of Spanish-language newspapers in publication today. According to the Pew Center for Research, *State of the News Media* 2011, citing the Latino Print Network, a media buying organization, there were 832 Hispanic newspapers in print in 2010, just three fewer than the prior year. These include dailies, weeklies, and less than weeklies, as well as , family-owned operations and Spanish-language newspapers published as part of mainstream media companies and large, independent Hispanic media ventures. Despite well-known struggles in the news media industry,

Spanish-language newspapers are doing better than their English-language counterparts, when looking at the number of newspapers paying to have their circulations' audited, a total of 142 in 2011 or a 17 percent increase when compared to 2009. (Pew Research Center, 2011)

While in terms of circulation, Spanish-language newspapers have seen a drop, but there is growth in other mediums, including television, radio, magazine and online. (Pew Research Center, 2011)

One of the largest Spanish-language newspaper today is La Opinión, a Los Angeles-based newspaper owned by ImpreMedia, a venture group with nine other publications, including newspapers in Texas and New York. Other Spanish-language newspapers include El Nuevo Herald (Miami), owned by McClatchy, Al Día, published by the Dallas Morning News (Belo) and La Voz de Houston, published by the Houston Chronicle (Hearst).

Today's Spanish-language media have different roles than in the past. The Latino Print Network, the media buying group, shows an evolution in content for Spanish-language weeklies in the last three decades. While in the 80s these newspapers had entertainment, sports, national news and classifieds, in the 90s business, health, lifestyle and Hispanic holiday-themed articles were added. In the 2000s, readers could also find women, youth, auto, high tech and real estate sections. This shows that the audience is interested in reading a full paper that gives them both news as well as entertainment. We could say that the different sections of these newspapers mirror the lives and interests of the

audience. At the same time, it shows that these newspapers have the funds to expand their newspapers, and the advertisers to cover the costs and profit from these growing sections.

In some instances research has shown that ethnic newspapers do a better job at reporting foreign news than mainstream newspapers (Moran, 2006; Murray, 2008). The common mission may be the construction of a Hispanic identity for immigrants of different Latin American countries, forged around the issue of immigration (Correa & Rodriguez, 2008). Spanish-language media work as a unifier of the pan-American, Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. to create one media market and forms a community based on language, tradition and culture. The Spanish-language media make themselves as representative of Hispanics in the U.S., creating and maintaining the concept of U.S. *Latinidad* (Dávila, 2000), which gives U.S. Hispanics a unified identity regardless of their country of origin.

In 1920 Robert Park saw the importance of the media in achieving this unity among immigrants. He writes:

“Our great cities, as we discover upon close examination, are mosaics of little language colonies, cultural enclaves, each maintaining its separate communal existence within the wider circle of the city's cosmopolitan life. Each one of these communities is certain to have some sort of co-operative or natural aid society, very likely a church, a school, possibly a theater, but most invariably a

press.” (Park, 1920, p.6)

Today, Spanish is everywhere in the U.S. (from government forms, to latin dance clubs, and news stations) Just as New York City was an extremely multicultural enclave in Park's 1920s, many areas in the U.S. have become increasingly bilingual. In most of today's metropolitan areas in the U.S. we find the two major Spanish-language TV stations, Spanish-language radio stations and sometimes several newspapers in Spanish, including at least one or two major ones, to reach a large Hispanic population. This study examines a major metropolitan area in the South that fits this description for the base of this research. It is important to point out, however, that this area is not as ethnically and culturally diverse as New York was in the 1920s, where Park based his research and observations because there is a large Hispanic population, rather than a varied international population. However, Spanish-language newspapers may still serve this community-resource role to the immigrant community, similar to what Rodriguez and Correa found in Austin (2008), where Spanish-language newspapers tend to publish community stories, such as sporting events, and even “how-to” articles for life in the U.S.

The majority of Hispanics in the area where this research takes place speak Spanish at home, 80 percent according to the Census' 2013 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. Of those, 30 percent speak English not well or not at all. The native Spanish-speakers in this area are the likely audience of Spanish-language newspapers, the ones that Spanish-language journalists serve because it is the only written news

media in their community that they can access. The only other way that non-English speakers in the U.S. can learn about what is happening in their community is by listening to Spanish-language radio or watching Spanish-language television. Their choices are limited.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study was looking to explore the how Spanish-language journalists choose stories to cover. The research focused on one Spanish-language newspaper in a large metropolitan area un the U.S. South.

The newspaper chosen for this case study had been in print for several decades and had a weekly distribution of more than 400,000. Journalists from Europe and Latin America, as well as US-born Hispanic journalists made up the editorial staff. The paper was distributed through boxes placed around the city, as well as delivered to households in residential areas with a heavy Hispanic population.

The author attempted to find support for the idea that Spanish-language journalists, consciously or not, tell their readers through their coverage, how to live in the U.S.

This research was conducted using qualitative methods , focusing on meaning and complexity (Creswell, 2009) of the Spanish-language journalist. answer the research questions.

The subject of agenda-building among Spanish-language journalists is complex and has to be researched in a way that acknowledges each person's experience during editorial meetings and story assignment. Also using face-to-face interviews with participants, the author was better able to understand how they choose stories to cover, looking to find support for agenda-setting.

While this research does not give us definitive answers about

Spanish-language journalists, it gives us needed insight into the way Spanish-language journalists inform the community. During this research, this author put herself in the newsroom, attending budget meetings for observation purposes, then interviewing two of the working journalists in order to get a clear understanding of the work they did, how they did it, and why they did it. By putting myself into this situation, I was able to observe their process as it happens every week, including the way they selected stories, and compare it to the journalist's own description of their work as told during the interviews.

Ethnography's beginnings are not clear, and it has evolved through the centuries as a way of understanding both history and different cultures (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994). By researching Spanish-language journalists, the author was, in a way, trying to understand a different media culture.

For this study, the author interviewed two editorial staff members, and observed four editorial meetings, guided by ethnography but fully aware with the fact that for a study so small, participant observation best described the research method.

Because the researcher had experience as a Spanish-language journalist, there was a possibility of using reflexive dyadic interviews, as those described by Ellis and Berger, 2001. These interviews are conducted more as a conversation between two equals than as a question and answer type of exchange where the interviewer has some hierarchy over the interviewee. With reflexive dyadic interviews the interviewer tries to

tune in to the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself (p. 854)

This type of interview created conversations where each of the interviewees was comfortable, allowing them to explain their work as well as describe their emotions about the work they did, how they did it and why they did it. Both journalists, and perhaps more so the reporter, showed a candor that brought a lot of insight into the interviews.

The researcher's experience in the field of ethnic journalism not only helped in creating meaningful interview questions, but offered insight into what went into the crafting of stories for a mostly immigrant audience, and gave the participants a level of comfort as they talked to someone who understood their work. In order to clarify the possibility of this researcher's bias, a detailed description can be found under the heading "The Researcher's role."

### **The Researcher's Role**

Because qualitative methods rely heavily on researchers' observations, perceptions and interpretations, it is important to disclose the author's personal connection to this subject and the research participants.

I was a reporter for this newspaper between March 2006 and May 2007. Before that, I worked for another Spanish-language newspaper for a little more than a year, also as a reporter.

At both publications I was an important part of how stories were selected. Every week the entire editorial staff met for budget meetings where stories were assigned and possible story ideas discussed. While the



editors were attuned to the community that we were covering, it most often fell upon reporters to bring story ideas to the meetings to discuss.

My familiarity with the subject may have shaped both the interviews as well as my interpretations. Although I was careful to ask detailed questions and knowing the subject from personal experience helped me know which questions were most important, there may have been other, perhaps more basic questions, that someone less familiar with the subject would have asked. In addition, most of the answers from the journalists were easy to understand for me and did not require many follow-up questions, as I knew from personal experience what these journalists were talking about. A novice on this subject may have reacted differently to the journalists' answers.

While I am a native Spanish-speaker, I do not, and have never considered myself an immigrant. I am a Spaniard, although my mother is a white American of Irish and German descent. Growing up, American culture was part of my life in many ways, and when I moved to the U.S. for college, I already spoke English, I had a U.S. passport, and I did not experience a "culture shock." Additionally, I moved and stayed in the U.S. by choice and with the real possibility of moving "home" if things did not work out for me. This unique background gave me the opportunity of being both an insider and an outsider in the Hispanic immigrant community.

As a reporter I was an insider because I am a native Spanish-speaker and I could communicate without a problem with my sources; I was an outsider because I was not part of the community and could

observe and report without letting my personal life interfere with my work. It is important to note that while I consider myself Hispanic, not every Hispanic person I encountered considered me part of the community because I am European.

These experiences allowed me to better understand the editorial and story assignment processes to help answer my research questions. Because I have been one of these journalists I have had the opportunity to analyze the work that I used to do and look at the reasons why I chose to cover one story over another. I maintain a casual friendship with editors and reporters in this newspaper, and my departure from my last assignment was amicable and on extremely good terms. I resigned from my post to attend to family issues. I have since left the area and no longer work as a reporter. I have not been a part of the Spanish-language media since 2007, which also has given me time and distance from journalism and the Spanish-speaking community of this area.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

**Setting.** This study was conducted mostly in the editorial offices of the newspaper, although there was work done remotely from my home, including follow-up interviews, some of the observations and the textual analysis.

The newspaper is a biweekly broadsheet publication with a total weekly circulation of 405,000. Distribution is a mix of free household delivery and racks, with the bulk of the copies being delivered. Originally founded by a Hispanic family more than 30 years ago as a weekly

publication, it was purchased by a large media corporation a decade ago, and functions as the Spanish-language newspaper of the area's major English-language newspaper. Since its purchase, the newspaper has added another weekly issue (for a total of two issues per week) to meet advertisers' demands. The first issue of the week is used to publish current news and stories anticipating the weekend, while the weekend edition offers expanded, analytical articles and enterprise stories, those that are possible to be written only after cultivating sources for a longer period of time and knowing the subject well, as opposed to the daily or breaking news-style story.

In the last decade, the newspaper has also added web presence, with its own domain name, which also links from the English-language newspaper's website. As of 2012, the Spanish-language newspaper's website receives more than 50,000 unique visitors per month, according to the newspaper's own media kit, and as reported by Omniture.

The publication has a small editorial staff and occasional freelance writers. The newspaper's newsroom is housed in the same building as the parent English-language newspaper. Being in the same building fosters collaboration between the two newsrooms, and individual journalists, it also allows the Spanish-language newspaper to utilize the English-language paper's resources, such as photography and design services. Although the Spanish-language newsroom functions mostly independently of the English-language newsroom, which gives them the autonomy to pursue the kinds of stories they want without interference from the English-language

newsroom, the editor is an assistant managing editor for the English-language newspaper, who works solely on its Spanish-language products but participates in executive decision making. This editor reports to the managing editor and publisher of the English-language newspaper.

The newspaper has an editorial staff of two news reporters, a sports editor, an entertainment editor, an online editor and a life style editor in addition to the assistant managing editor who runs the publication, for a total of seven staff members. They use design services and advertising from their English-language counterpart.

The interviews for this research were conducted in this newsroom, using the journalists' natural setting to conduct interviews is a usual qualitative method (Creswell, 2009). A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

**Actors.** This study focused on news only, so only news reporters and editors, as opposed to entertainment or sports reporters, were interviewed.

**Events.** Using interviews, observation and textual analysis, the focus of this study was the story selection process of Spanish-language journalists, including how story ideas develop, editorial discussions and the final choices made.

**Processes.** Particular attention was paid to the editorial meetings to select stories and the reasoning behind those selections. Another important part of the research paid special attention to the story idea selection process that each journalist goes through on his or her own before bringing

them to the editorial meetings.

In order to understand the work and roles of these journalists, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with two Spanish-language journalists. Using long interviews, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes and additional time later on for follow up, was key to learning more about how stories were chosen, assigned and crafted. These interviews gave this researcher a view into the world that these journalists live and work in (McCracken, 1988).

**Ethical considerations.** This researcher did not encounter any meaningful ethical considerations, except for the ones previously described under the header The Researcher's Role.

Data was collected in the spring of 2014 in a series of interviews with each journalist, observation of budget meetings, and text analysis of past newspapers.

The interviews included one individual, face-to-face interview with two different editorial staff members. One of the observations was done on site, while the other three via video conferencing due to a last-minute schedule plan on the journalist' side. There was no noticeable difference whether the observations were done via video conference or in person, as the researcher was not participating and just observing. If anything, the staff seemed to forget I was observing when it was done remotely, and they tended to create some eye contact during the meeting I attended. Note transcription of the interviews occurred on the days following the interviews. Notes from the observations were transcribed immediately after

each.

For the text analysis, the author spent two days going through the newspaper's archives, which can be found online, and focused exclusively on each issue's main and secondary stories, which were often, but not always, the cover story, as well as the side bars that accompany that story during a four-month period (16 issues of this one-time weekly, now biweekly newspaper) as a sample of coverage. The purpose of this, was to gather information about the issues covered, as well as any additional information included in the article, such as contacts or how-to articles, and look for patterns that are consistent with the mission or roles found through interviews with journalists.

The four-month period was from September to December 2013, a period when there is considerable civic and social activity in the U.S. including elections, and traditional American holidays.

**Interpretation.** “The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). With the collection of interviews from the editorial staff, the author compared each of the participant's thoughts on his or her own story-selection process and collective story assignment process as part of the budget meetings.

Using observations from the budget meetings, the author attempted to find a pattern of story selection that included the participants' comments regarding their process.

The text analysis of past newspapers allowed to find a pattern in cover stories, not just in the subjects covered, but also in the additional

information included in the story. Data was coded, interrelating and interpreting it following multiple-step analysis. (Creswell, 2009)

**Verification.** In order to ensure the validity of the research, the author pursued a number of verification processes, starting with triangulation; collecting data in three manners, interviews, observation and text analysis. In all of the data collection, but most importantly in the observation part of the research the author checked with each of the participants, member checking, to make sure that their conversations were interpreted accurately.

**Reporting the findings.** The author collected data in three forms—interviews, observation and text analysis. Because this was a qualitative study, the best way to report the findings was by combining all three in a narrative.

This research took place in a newsroom and is about people who work hard every day to create a newspaper. There was a story to be told about these journalists who were doing a different kind of journalism, and that were helping a community integrate into this country.

The research started with an observation of a weekly budget meeting, where the entire editorial staff met to determine which stories would be published in the next issue of the newspaper, taking into consideration the amount of space available— after advertisements were placed. During budget meetings, stories were also prioritized by importance and given a place in the newspaper, front page or inside, for example. Although the parts of the meeting that were of interest for this study were

those where local news were discussed, the author observed the meeting from start to finish. During this observation, and all others, I stayed silent, observing and taking notes.

The next interaction was another budget meeting, with a similar situation as the one just described. Following this budget meeting I conducted each of the two interviews with the two journalists. Each interview was done individually and in private. They were conducted in person and in the newsroom where these journalists work, to increase their comfort level.

During the interviews the pre-selected questions were asked, although a conversation was established early on, making the interview more free-flowing and allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions and clarifications as needed.

Since time allowed, this author was able to be in the newsroom and observe quick interactions between reporters and the editor, which gave the researcher an additional level of context on the way these journalists interact and work.

The third observation was of a meeting between a reporter and the editor. This meeting was a little bit different than the other budget meetings, as the journalists discussed the current stories the reporter was working on, but with enough time still before the biweekly deadline that the editor was able to guide the reporter. This allowed me to witness the type of questions the editor wanted answered and how the editor wanted the stories reported and written— It was in this meeting that it became very



clear that the editor was very concerned with stories to having a very defined demographic, asking the reporter questions such as “How does this affect Latinos? Are there numbers specific for Latinos, not just the general population?” and “If there aren't numbers specific to Latinos we don't have a story.” This meaning that stories about the general population can be done by mainstream, English-language newspapers, but they needed to do stories that were more specific and went deeper into how a story affected the Hispanic community.

After this observation the text analysis was done. I read the main and secondary stories of each newspaper issue during the time frame selected, September 2013 to December 2013, and looked for the type of story, who wrote it, the subject of the story as well as the inclusion of sidebars and additional information. Choosing to do it at this time allowed me to look for some of the things that the journalists had talked about, and notice if their comments matched with the reality of the published story. For example, I noticed fairly quickly that even though the reporter emphasized her use of sidebars— separate columns, stories, graphics or boxes that were related to the story but either present it in a different way or give additional information in a way that is easy to find, such as phone numbers or checklists— there really were not many used.

The last observation was another weekly budget meeting and similar to the ones described previously. Doing this last observation after the text analysis, again allowed me to look for specific things I had noticed, for example the repetition of certain subjects for stories— community, politics,

immigration.

After the research was done, I was able to go through my notes, compare each of the three research methods and write my findings. A follow-up email to each of the interviewed journalists, and subsequent video conference interview for more follow-up questions.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The first question that needed to be answered was, what is the role of the Spanish-language journalist in this newsroom?

During the interviews and observations for this research, it became clear that the Spanish-language journalists wanted to help readers navigate life in the United States, and the journalists saw this as a major part of their job.

The journalists talked about enjoying the social aspect of journalism, the side of the industry that gives a voice to those who do not have one, and uncovers injustices. For their readership, they talked about giving their readers the basic information they needed to live in a new country as immigrants, and so, they described the newspaper as a “navigation guide.” Their audience was segmented into various groups including recent immigrants, who did not speak English well, young U.S.-born Hispanics, and highly educated and bilingual immigrants, and across different media platforms, including print newspaper, a website and social media platforms—both Twitter and Facebook.

A secondary role was that of covering the Hispanic community with stories that were very specific and “could compete” in quality with stories in English-language newspapers: coverage, they said, that was not found in English-language newsrooms.

These journalists wanted to talk about their audience. They knew a great deal about them and seemed to genuinely care about them and the

content that they gave them. They wanted their work to make a difference in their readers' lives and improve them, either by giving them the basic steps to live in the U.S. or by covering stories that affected this Hispanic community as a whole, such as changes in immigration law. "I want people to be able to use the information—or for it to have an impact in their lives. I want people to see themselves in the stories," said the reporter.

They knew the audience because a large portion of their days were spent talking with them, attending the same events they did and meeting with them in their homes and places of work and worship. "I communicate with them through social media. I attend cultural and political events, even if I am not there to cover them... I like to meet them as a journalist and as a person," said the reporter.

In the last decade, they said, this newspaper's audience had changed. It was no longer just the stereotypical recently arrived Mexican immigrant who does not know English. Their current audience also included educated professionals from across Latin America who were educated and well-traveled, as well as U.S.-born and raised Hispanics wanting to read in-depth articles about issues that affect the Hispanic community.

"The function of the newspaper is to help the Hispanic community move ahead," said the editor. Moving ahead, the editor said, meant understanding how life worked in the U.S. This concept of "moving ahead" is comparable to Boski's description of integration of two cultures in one person as a desirable ideal (2008, p. 142).

Despite enjoying this social aspect, the editor acknowledged that the newspaper is a business first— and if it was not, it would not exist.

### **The Audience**

Having celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary under the management of a large media corporation, the newspaper's audience, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had changed significantly. The changes were allowing the newspaper to expand its coverage, but they also presented some challenges that will be described further in the findings.

The editor used surveys to learn about the publication's audience, as well as social media interaction and attendance at different community events, such as celebrations at consulates and embassies, awards ceremonies for different organizations, press events and health fairs. The reporter said it was also “instinct” and being out in the community that told them who their readership was.

As described by the editor, there were five different groups that made up the publication's audience:

Group 1: Needed the most basic information. They had a low educational level and did not know the [American] “system”.

They were from Mexico and Central America.

Group 2: They were mostly from Colombia and Argentina and were in the area due to professional work in the oil and medical fields. They were highly educated and had a high socio-economic status. They did not need basic information but they did not necessarily know how government, schools

etc. work.

Group 3: Wealthy Mexicans fleeing violence at home. They were bilingual, had a high educational level and a very high socio-economic status. They were big influencers in the suburbs and also did not need that basic information, although they may not be familiar with the U.S. systems.

Group 4: Second-generation Hispanic Americans. They were between 19-25 years of age and raised in the U.S. They spoke Spanish as well as English, and they wanted information that was published in ethnic media because they could not find it in English-language newspapers– mostly about Hispanic issues and immigration.

Group 5: They were Mexican-Americans but spoke little Spanish. However, readers in this group had a very strong cultural identity and were active in the political scene. They did not need basic information but wanted to stay informed on various subjects affecting the Hispanic community.

A decade ago, the newspaper's main audience was that first group, and stories were written keeping them in mind. At that time, web presence was small and the publication was not using social media, which was just starting.

The publication was trying to reach out to the different audiences and give them what they needed, while still remaining a relevant newspaper in the Hispanic community and their geographic area. “The

group that needs information the most is the first one. Although as a newspaper we don't necessarily need them the most," said the editor.

These changes had come about due to changes in immigration patterns and law. And because of them, the editor said, the role of the Spanish-language journalist could not just be about helping the newly arrived immigrant. This type of reader did not bring in advertising revenue, and there was a wider group of potential readers who also wanted information and were also attractive to advertisers.

The editor's observations contrasted with Kanellos' 2007 finding that new waves of immigrants have kept audiences for Spanish-language newspapers fresh. For Spanish-language newspapers under a large media group, this constant flow of readers that *grow out* of the need for the newspaper may not be enough to make it profitable. In the case of this newspaper, they were trying to change with their audience to stay relevant as well as to maintain a profitable business venture.

Of their publication, the editor said they needed to make a decision about who they wanted to reach, and who they wanted their audience to be, soon or they ran the risk of publishing a newspaper that tried to be too many things. This was already happening in their newspaper, the editor said, although they did try to target specific audiences by using their different platforms: web and social media. As the editor explained, the stories that were selected for the print version, in news, sports, leisure and lifestyle, were mixed and intended to appeal to a wide audience. On their website they could focus more on stories that would appeal to an audience

group that had internet access and were presumably more educated and did not need the more basic information. With social media, they could promote stories, or angles to stories, that younger and tech-savvy audiences would want to read. This model, the editor said, worked, but according to her, they needed to focus their print editions.

### **Spanish-language vs. English-language**

In general terms these journalists were aware that journalism is about informing the public, no matter what language was used. What was different in Spanish-language journalism in the U.S., they said, was the needs of that public and the level of in depth coverage of the Hispanic community.

For some audience groups those needs were very basic– it meant articles that explained, for example, the U.S. educational system, or changes in immigration law directed at undocumented immigrants– while for other groups it may be getting the sort of Latino-specific coverage that they did not get elsewhere, such as in-depth and continued coverage of big stories that made it to mainstream media only for a little bit, like the wave of unaccompanied minors crossing into the U.S., or how the closing of health centers affected the Hispanic community specifically.

In English-language journalism, readers were already established, they said, they did not need basic information. In general, the content of a newspaper did not guide their lives and was not meant to do so. However for a large section of the Spanish-language newspaper audience, weekly articles had an impact on their understanding of life in this country. The



editor gave the example of a story about the local school district. In their newspaper, one of the first questions to answer in the story was: What is a school district? And how does it work? The English-language newspapers did not have to answer these questions as this was information the audience already knew.

“It is not the same [journalistic] function in English in many ways; The type of subjects we cover and the angles. We look for the “why” you don't find that in English language journalism.

The Latino theme is also not well covered in English. It is not just about translating a story, it is translating from the anglo world to the Hispanic world. You have to go further than translation, there is a different sensibility [in what we do], it is more authentic.”

Reporter

Even for Hispanic audiences with higher educational and socio-economic levels, information about issues that affect the community was limited, they said. Thus, there is still a need for these types of stories targeted to all Hispanic readers in ethnic media, because they fulfill information needs that mainstream press is not meeting.

According to the editor, Spanish-language newspapers had staff whose beat was the Hispanic community. They belonged to the community and understood the issues. As the editor explained,

“it is not about covering Cinco de Mayo, which

is not a big deal in the community, but English-language newsrooms think it is, but knowing how important it is to follow up on the Dream Act.”

The editor explained that an English-language newsroom could cover the Hispanic community just as well, but they would need to have a number of Hispanic journalists in the newsroom that was more representative of the community they covered, so that they were aware of the stories that mattered to the community, access to sources that were otherwise hard to find, and had enough reporters to cover those stories.

### **Being Part of the Community**

Both journalists interviewed had extensive journalistic experience inside and outside of the U.S. They both had studied journalism and had a professional attitude towards the work that they did. However, they both considered themselves to be part of the community they were covering. They were both immigrants, and considered themselves as much despite having lived and worked in the U.S. for close to two decades each, and they both said they related strongly with the Hispanic community.

While these journalists described themselves to be part of the community, they were not the stereotypical Hispanic immigrant, with a low educational level, poor command of English and not assimilated into the anglo culture. They were highly educated, of a mid to high socio-economic status, were tech savvy and lived a completely bicultural and bilingual life in the U.S. Even if they knew of the struggles and needs of that audience group 1, the recently arrived immigrant with a low educational level, they

had more similarities to those in audience group 3, foreign-born Hispanics with a high education level and high socio-economic status. As the reporter explained, “we know first hand about the immigrant/latino experience, but we are also fully assimilated into the U.S. anglo culture.”

Having a common language with the community they cover was an obvious part of why they were themselves part of the community, the editor explained, but empathy and understanding of the immigrant experience, as well as cultural competence made a difference when it came to covering the Hispanic community. This was part of what they said made them part of the community.

The reporter talked about “instinct” about the way she looked for stories, “We know from experience the type of difficulty [they have], we know the society that they are trying to adapt into.”

For the reporter, this meant that their articles were influenced by the questions they themselves would want to know about specific subjects. It also meant that they used their own experience as immigrants to look for and write stories. Because the reporter had had to learn how to live in the U.S., and had experienced the difficulties of starting anew in a new country, the reporter easily recognized stories in the community, and was able to quickly identify sources.

As members themselves of this community, they were also capable of getting to sources that were difficult to interview— such as undocumented immigrants, and seamlessly code switch to talk to a CEO or a senator.

Having spent years as immigrants, they had been in some similar

situations as any immigrant had: starting from zero, not having the support system of a family and not knowing the intricacies of life and culture in the new country, even if they had not had to struggle with other difficulties such as living in the country undocumented and with limited job opportunities and not having an education in either language. They said that they were able to look at their experiences and those of the immigrants they had worked with, to guide their reporting and find the information that would give readers more than an article to read, but a way to understand life in the U.S.

The closeness to the community could bring problems, however, as the editor explained it could be difficult for these journalists to distance themselves from the community they belonged to, and for the community to see Spanish-language news media for what it was.

“It is a delicate thing, because sometimes readers think that as a journalist you can fix their problems. Interacting with them has to be done in a way that you don't become a social worker.

Part of this, is that there are people with many needs, and they'll hold on to anything, including news media in their language. And Spanish-language media also have fault in this, because big and small outlets often will get more involved than what would be considered their journalistic work.

With the type of coverage we do, we do have a

community service aspect, but I don't think it is good for journalists to get personally involved in different causes. Spanish-language media has given itself this image of a secondary activist.

It would be easy to confuse where the lines are; they get blurred. Part of it is that the journalist is part of the community. This is not good for anyone involved, because later on it is hard to claim any sort of objectivity.”

### **Challenges**

As mentioned previously, changing immigration patterns and evolving immigration law was giving Spanish-language newspapers their own set of challenges. At this point, this newspaper was struggling with finding an audience base, and was instead trying to reach as many people as possible with their hard copy newspaper, and reaching out to other audience groups through their website and social media. As the Pew Research Center State of Hispanic Media 2011 study found, Hispanic audiences were changing: they were young, mostly bilingual and acculturated.

“Among Latinos, a majority are bilingual. However, as births have become more important for Hispanic population growth than the arrival of new immigrants, the nation’s Latino population is also becoming more U.S.-born. All of these factors could pose a threat to Spanish-language media operations. So far though,

the contrary has occurred” (para. 3)

Because of this changing audience, the editor was aggressive in finding their audience base and appealing to a broader group of readers by expanding coverage to include articles that would appeal to recent arrivals, established foreign-born Hispanics and U.S.-born Hispanic-Americans. This changing coverage included in-depth political reporting, including an analysis of the results after a mayoral election, business profiles, such as that of a Hispanic entrepreneur, and some higher education reporting such as a story from November 2013 about more Hispanic students taking the college-entrance exams (SATs) than Anglo students, but fewer Hispanics students actually enrolling in college, in addition to stories about immigration.

In addition to the audience challenges, the editor warned that the Spanish-language journalist as it is today is not a professional that was going to last much longer. This newsroom for example, was joining in with their English-language counterpart in order to improve coverage in both publications of the Hispanic community. She pointed out at how in years past a mention of a Hispanic journalist would mean someone working for Univision, the Spanish-language television network, but today, a Hispanic journalist did not have to work for a Spanish-language outlet or cover Hispanic affairs at all. A Hispanic journalist could and was often found in mainstream media outlets, covering all kinds of beats.

The Spanish-language journalist of tomorrow, the editor explained, would need to be fully bilingual and bicultural and be comfortable in both

the Hispanic community and the Anglo community both personally and professionally. This journalist would be able to work for mainstream English language media, but create quality content for those interested in Hispanic-specific stories, whether that was done in English or in Spanish.

Interestingly, this description is very similar to Boski's description of integration as merger of two cultural sets (2008, p. 145)

More Hispanics are getting their news in English, according to a recent Pew Research Center study, while fewer are getting their news in Spanish (2014). These audiences needed good coverage of the Hispanic community, but not necessarily in Spanish. If English-language newspapers wanted a share of this English-speaking, Hispanic audience they would need to offer them quality coverage of Hispanic issues, the editor said.

“In the near future, a journalist needs to be able to work in both languages and both cultures in order to remain relevant. Fusion [an ABC Univision joint venture] is going to show if this convergence of English-language television for the Latino community has a future”

### **Serving the Community**

For the second question of this research, the author wanted to know how these journalists were serving the community they were writing for. Findings from this question would open the door to what kinds of stories they chose, why and for what purpose.

During interviews and observations there was a theme that kept

coming up: “So what?” It was clear that the editor of this newspaper was trying to create quality products and that the journalists believed that it was that quality of information, and not any underlying roles, that would ultimately serve the community. With the constant questioning, the editor wanted to make sure that the stories published mattered to the readers, as it likely happens in every news operation.

The newspaper was published twice a week. In addition they maintained a website and were active on social media, both individually and as the newspaper itself. It was through these different platforms that they were able to reach the different audience groups presented previously. Younger, tech-savvy readers communicated with the newspaper and journalists via Twitter; They request coverage of subjects and give feedback.

Online data also gave the editor a clear picture of the stories that were read the most. This information was so important to them, in fact, that it was shared with the rest of the newsroom during the regularly scheduled budget meetings. Whether they ended up online or in print, the stories in this paper were designed to be useful. Both journalists interviewed said that they wanted this of their stories, and, since this study included a textual analysis, the researcher found it useful to compare what the journalists said they did, and what actually ended up in the paper.

The text analysis showed that almost all of the local news stories were long-form, narrative pieces. Of 32 stories during the time frame analyzed, only two were different- both Q&A-style articles.



One of the stories was about myths regarding the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, while the other was an interview with a Hispanic entrepreneur. These very different stories were a good example of the emphasis the editor was putting in engaging a wide range of readers. While both stories could interest a wide range of Hispanics, the one about Obamacare discrediting three myths about the law would have an impact only on documented immigrants or U.S. citizens, as undocumented immigrants do not qualify for the policies under the law. It could be argued that those in the lower-middle and lower socio-economic classes would be the most interested to learn about this topic, for example, if the policies available through Obamacare would be less or more expensive than the health insurance they currently have.

The subject of the interview with the entrepreneur was someone who was a professional and entrepreneur in her native country. Once in the U.S. she and her husband started a new business—one that was innovative and could potentially help the Hispanic community. Readers of this article would identify with this person only if they had similar situations, such as having an education or professional experience in their country of origin. It seems like this story would appeal more to that upper, middle-class immigrant, although it did show that there is opportunity for advancement in the U.S. for immigrant Hispanics. It is worth mentioning that this story was written by a freelance, and it is hard to determine if this type of story would also be written by one of the full-time reporters.

The reporter said that they did try to include sidebars and bullet

points to make each story more useful or “utility,” however, it did not seem like they were relying that often on this type of additional information. Only 11 of those 32 stories had these kinds of additions. When they did appear, however, they often had useful information, such as phone numbers or checklists. These stories were about the Dream Act, the Voter ID law, a crime prevention program, a new healthcare law and how it has affected clinics, shoplifting during the holidays, a successful K-12 program, cuts in the food stamp program, middle-class Hispanics, online child pornography, early childhood education, and loans to cover citizenship application fees.

Some of these stories lent themselves to having this information pulled out of the main text for easy access, such as the stories about child pornography, shoplifting and crime prevention as they all had tip-line information. The story about the citizenship application fee had information about the fee, as well as a chart of fees over the years, which is interesting but perhaps not obviously useful unless someone thinks about not delaying application to avoid paying more in the future. The story about food stamps, however, had extremely useful information for the reader, as one offered information about how to get food stamps, and it made sense that it would have a side bar as part of its package.

For the editor serving the community was a responsibility, and not something to be taken lightly or to be done easily.

Any and all information is good, they really need it,  
but we are responsible for its quality. The risk is that  
because they need it so much to think that anything will do.

Another risk is to manipulate your audience, and to only cover the easy stuff.

We do a service in subjects like immigration, health and education. Recently we've done an extensive series on Obamacare and we received a lot of questions. People just didn't know what is happening. We service that readership [Group 1], others not so much.

In this specific instance, the newsroom received questions about how the new law would affect the different groups, such as those who were in the country without documentation.

Healthcare stories were not as numerous as politics and immigration, as the textual analysis showed. Politics and immigration was covered most often (10), followed by general community stories (9) such as stories about Hispanic awards, community members preventing crime alongside the police, a woman's purchase of a billboard to help solve her husband's murder, and the celebration of Thanksgiving in the Hispanic community; Education(6), including Hispanics wanting more early childhood education for their children, an internship program for students in high school, and Hispanics taking the SAT's in larger numbers than Anglos; crime (4) including stories about online child pornography, alleged police abuse, and a special unit to fight human trafficking; and healthcare (3) including two stories about Obamacare and a story about clinics closing after a change in the law.

These stories have a very broad appeal, although most of them

would appeal to immigrants with families and those who are in the U.S. to stay and would want to know about the education, healthcare systems, and still be part of the Hispanic community. Of interest was the story about celebrating Thanksgiving. Even though this is not a story that would heavily impact an immigrant, it is one that shows that emphasis in helping the community integrate while maintaining a link to the Hispanic culture. A traditional American holiday, Thanksgiving is embraced by immigrants of all origins. This story offered ways to celebrate the holiday and adding some Hispanic flare to it.

While it could be argued that all journalists have a sense of helping others, these journalists seemed to make a difference between their role and that of their English-language counterparts. The needs of their audiences were what made them have this function of serving the community. They also made a difference in how they did it. The reporter talked about looking at the “why” in every story, including basic information and background on how different aspects of life are in the U.S., information that for U.S. born and raised people would consider common knowledge. On her part, the editor asked during meetings why would the reader need the information or care about it at a very basic level

### **Choosing stories**

The last question for this study was how these journalists chose the stories they covered. The editor and the reporter had slightly different views.

The changes in audience had created some challenges in how

stories were chosen. When it came to news stories, the focus of this research, most stories were still geared towards that first group, recently arrived immigrants, however, as the editor said, the newspaper was becoming a hybrid. They were choosing subjects to cover to reach different types of audiences, with the intent of capturing and retaining readers.

Each reporter was responsible for coming up with their own stories, rarely did the editor assign a story, although the reporter said that the editor did have a big impact in the subjects that were covered.

For the reporter, this translated into tapping into that expertise of being an immigrant and having assimilated into U.S. culture to give readers stories that she thought would matter to them “I want people to be able to use the information, for it to have an impact in their lives. I want people to see themselves in the stories.”

The editor had weekly meetings with each reporter where they discussed the stories they were working on for the week, in addition to any other projects they may have had coming up.

While the reporters were knowledgeable about their stories, the editor seemed to always suggest either additional expert sources as well as other types of sources that the reporter should be looking for. These meetings were short, about 30 minutes, and efficient.

There was also a weekly editorial meeting where the whole team of reporters and editors met to talk about the coming issue, talking at length about each of their stories. In this meeting other editors and reporters had the chance to inquire about others' stories, added ideas and suggested

sources, however it seemed like at this point the stories were mostly ready to be filed.

During the observations, the reporters and editors never said anything about helping the reader, or suggested ways of making the stories of greater utility, even though during the interviews they did say they always had that role in mind and thought they accomplished it. It seemed like this notion of helping the immigrant was so intrinsic to their work that it appeared that they did not feel it was needed to be mentioned, and was only acknowledged when they were asked directly, such as during the interviews.

What was noticeable, however, was a constant need to localize every report or study that was used as a source or as a subject, not just for the geographic area, but also for demographics. For example, if the subject of a story was a new study on poverty, the question would be “How did the Hispanic community fare?” This was done to the point of suggesting that if there was no detailed information about the Hispanic community, there was no story. If that was established, then the reporter would need to localize it for the metropolitan area.

The fact that these journalists felt so close to the community was the key to the work they did. Their identity as immigrants and their experience as acculturated Hispanics seemed to guide them in deciding what would be useful to their readership. This was the main way they chose their stories because although they did belong to just one of the audience groups, they were constantly in touch with all of them, and they had the common thread

of speaking the same language and in most cases also being immigrants themselves. It seemed, however, that the editor was constantly guarding this so that the newspaper could reach a wider audience and did not become a problem solver, as explained previously.

Social issues and politics were among the reporter's favorite subjects to cover, and she was able to do so in this newspaper.

“I get a lot of satisfaction from my job. Journalism is a vocational profession. You feel you give a voice to the voiceless, or you uncovered something.”

[...]

“What we do is act as a liaison between their culture of origin and their current lives. We want to have a direct impact on their lives.”

The editor wanted to do stories that uncovered issues and that no one else was doing, and let readers know what was happening. These investigative stories were difficult to do with a small staff that still needed to work on the needs of a weekly newspaper and daily coverage online. However, the editor said, many of the stories they already did could become investigative with additional time.

“It is not that easy for us to do these kind of stories, we have fewer resources, and fewer reporters. But these are the best ones. There is a sense that the best stories are community stories, which are good, but those don't give much to the newspaper. The ones that really make a

difference are the ones that go beyond the obvious, and can compete with an English-language news outlet.”

“I get personal satisfaction for the reporters. I realize how hard it is to find the number of sources we require in such a short amount of time. When they feel like they've done a great job, it is good for the publication, that defines our brand.”

One such story was done a few years back, the editor said, when a reporter found irregularities in the school district that were part of the reason why Hispanic students were dropping out of high school in large numbers. Another story they would like to work on is the effect of Obamacare in the Hispanic community specifically, which they had found in small scale articles to be very positively.

At the moment, the editor said, they tried to have a good mix of stories that would appeal across audience groups for print, this included entertainment stories about music that appealed to young and older people, lifestyle stories for a middle-class audience, features on successful Hispanic business owners, and sports coverage that included local, national and Latin American sports in addition to local news stories. Online and through social media they were able to target different audiences by highlighting some of that work for a younger audience and packaging big stories with translations of wire reports, translations from their parent paper and their own reports to create wide coverage.

The audience that the journalists reached started with the subjects



they chose. “That defines who is getting that information”, said the editor.

They picked stories for different mediums intentionally, while at the same time creating a newspaper that was a hybrid and would appeal to a wide range of readers. “The intention is to be inclusive and to capture [readers]”

The textual analysis showed that they did do a variety of stories and tried to be inclusive. Even so, politics and immigration dominated their coverage, which supported the notion that they want to do stories that matter to them— as immigrants and members of a civic society they would need information about both subjects.

Every story was written in simple, correct, neutral Spanish, without the use of country-specific words— Spanish is the same language whether you are from El Salvador or Colombia, although variations of some words are very common, especially when spoken.

Most stories were local, although there were some localized national news stories, such as the impact of Obamacare in the area, or a story about the Dream Act—both of these national stories would have a big impact in the Hispanic community in this area, so it is understandable that they would cover them.

From this analysis it was clear that they were trying to reach out to different audiences, as there was a story about food stamps, as well as a story about what the Hispanic upper-middle class looked like in this area— who they were, what they did and where they came from— in consecutive weeks.

While advocacy organizations and governmental agencies did not seem to have much presence in stories, and the reporter said in the interview that they avoided writing stories off of press releases, there were a couple of not-for-profit organizations that did seem to be very present in stories— either as authors of reports that become a story or a source for a story. These included the Pew Center for Research, Hispanic Trends Project, a research organization that chronicles the life of Hispanics in the U.S. and a local demographic research center.

It was perhaps these research groups, along with the Hispanic community in the area and national news events that also guided the general content of this newspaper.

## **5: Discussion**

### **Agenda-building**

From the first interview for this research it was clear that these journalists believed they were helping their readers learn how to live in the U.S. As Siblani and Siblani (2007) pointed out in their research, “coaching is needed,” (p.36) to help immigrants adjust to life in the U.S., and these journalists seemed to agree and complied with this notion.

It was through their own experiences as immigrants and through their own experiences as assimilated Hispanics in the U.S. that these journalists constructed a newspaper that would give readers a self-described navigation guide. Just as McQuail's description of the theory of agenda-setting, these journalists were giving their readers what they thought were the most important news for their acculturation into the country.

The text analysis showed that these stories were education, healthcare, politics and immigration, and as Branton and Dunaway showed in the 2008 study, they showed the positive, and not negative, side of immigration.

Because of audience changes and shifting within the Hispanic community, these journalists were trying to offer a more varied newspaper, one that appealed to a wider audience. The editor talked about targeting different audience groups from the subject selection– for example immigration stories to target recent immigrants– so even though the journalists were choosing stories based on their own thoughts on what was important to the

reader, they were also guided by what content the reader would find interesting.

Changes in immigration patterns and audiences across the country were making the Spanish-language journalist irrelevant, said the editor who talked about the journalists' need to become bicultural and bilingual and being able to work in both Spanish-language and English-language news outlets. If this happened, however, it would not change the character of this group of journalists. Villar and Bueno-Olson talked about the identity and mission of a newspaper that made content differences in their 2013 study, not the language or ethnicity, and this seemed to hold true for these journalists who already work in a bicultural environment. Their intent was to help the community and cover stories that no one else was covering, not necessarily doing it in Spanish.

Both journalists interviewed talked about wanting to go beyond the press release and what they considered easy coverage of news in order to give quality content to their readers. While the subjects were in general set by the editor, the individual stories were for the most part chosen by the reporters. Their expertise gave them the ability to be judges of what was news worthy (Weaver and Elliott, 1982).

These journalists knew that their audience was changing and just as Shoemaker, Reese and Danielson said (1987), there was a renewed interest among a younger, U.S.-born generation of Hispanics for content that is either in Spanish or about Hispanics. For these journalists this means that the content they created had to be attractive for this group as well, and be

something they could not find anywhere else. It also meant that while they still needed coverage that stayed close to the immigrant community, including immigration policy, struggles and success stories, they also needed to focus on the U.S. born Hispanic and have stories with which they would identify.

While traditionally feedback had not been extensive, this younger and more tech-savvy audience was making use of social media to request coverage of specific events, and also general subjects. They were taking part of building this newspaper.

It was not necessary to do much research to find support for the hypothesis this study started with, that Spanish-language journalists in the United States try to help immigrants assimilate into the country. However, the journalists in this study did not seem to be doing this through how stories were structured, side bars, how-to articles etc., which were not numerous as found through the textual analysis, but through the selection of subjects to cover, reporting and writing long-form explanatory articles. Both journalists interviewed said that they did this purposely, and saw it as a function of their work. This function, they said, should not compromise quality or become more than a guiding map to life in the U.S., for they risk becoming “social workers.”

Things were changing, however, and there were different audience groups with different information needs, not just the need for learning to live in this country, and no other unifying trait than that of being able to read in Spanish and being of Hispanic heritage. Without realizing, these journalists may have been participating in unifying a community that may otherwise not have much in common but their language, just as Park described in this

1920s book, and Dávila calls *Latinidad*. (2000).

## **Limitations**

This study set out to learn about the role of the Spanish-language journalists in the U.S. Interviews, observations and text analysis gave this author the ability to see part of the process that these journalists went to in creating their newspaper. Because they assigned a big part of their story selection to instinct it is hard to describe an exact process.

This study did not look at the receiving end of newspaper publishing, the audience. Without their input, it was not possible to know if these journalists were in fact covering the issues that they wanted to read, or if they showed any kind of agenda setting effects. Including them in this study, however, would not have been advisable for such a small research project.

Although this study was originally framed under the theories of agenda-setting and agenda-building, this author only found support for agenda-building. While doing research for the study, the author found that there is very limited feedback from readers, and this study did not include readers as participants, so it would be impossible to determine how the readership ranks the importance of subjects and stories to determine an agenda setting effect.

Lastly, this study is too small to be able to be generalized. In order for the findings to be supported fully, a larger study, researching Spanish-language media outlets across the country would have to be done.

## **Personal Limitations**

Although I was very familiar with the subject, having been a Spanish-language journalist in the past, it had been too long for my experiences to be

relevant. As I learned through the research, while some things have remained the same, many more, including the audience, had changed since I wrote my last article for a Spanish-language newspaper. My background in Spanish-language media did allow me a certain level of insight for this project, however, immigration patterns, law and the Hispanic communities in the U.S. have changed dramatically in the last decade.

### **Future research**

This author is satisfied with the result of this study, however, I do believe that in order for this subject to be better understood, it would be necessary to also research the readership. This would also clear up information regarding the potential agenda-setting effect in readers.

A survey of readers, giving them a list of subjects that often appear in this newspaper and ranking them by importance, would be a good way to start. I would also do additional interviews with members of the different audience groups as described by the editor of this newspaper. These interviews would be one-on-one, and conversational, similar to the ones done with journalists for this study, to learn more about how readers view this newspaper.

This study opened the door to other possible subjects of research, from the changing role of the Spanish-language journalist, to the changing readership in the Hispanic community. Perhaps the most interesting to this author is how changing demographics in the U.S. may change traditional English-language media. Although it may be too soon to do a national study, researching the media environment in a metropolitan area with a large

Hispanic population— such as the one where this research took place— would be meaningful.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to see if Spanish-language journalists tried to help immigrants assimilate into the U.S.

With their background as immigrants and expertise as assimilated members of the greater U.S. community, these journalists chose subjects, pursued stories and designed articles to show readers the way life is lived in the U.S.

Conversations with two journalists revealed a skepticism towards becoming a secondary activist or social worker, for fear that they would not be able to also claim objectivity and perform basic journalistic functions. They also expressed a desire to go beyond this didactic role and do the kind of quality work on Hispanic issues that competes with established English-language media, as well as a need to go beyond coverage of community-type and basic issues in favor of content that appeals to an audience that is highly educated and bilingual.

Changes in immigration patterns and audiences present challenges for these journalists and their publication, as they see a need to evolve into bilingual and bicultural professionals who are able to work in either language and for ethnic or general media outlets.

This evolution of the Spanish-language and/or Hispanic journalist is an interesting subject for research, although it may still be too soon to get any kind of meaningful results.

This study, I believe, will provide insight on the relationship between Spanish-language journalists and the content they produce, and add to a limited amount of research in the field of Hispanic media.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. Are you an immigrant?
3. Why did you become a journalist?
4. Why did you choose Spanish-language journalism in the U.S.? (over English-language.)
5. What do you think is the purpose of Spanish-language journalism in the U.S.?
6. How is it different than English-language journalism?
7. Who is your audience?
8. Do you think you are offering a service to the immigrant community? What kind of service?
9. How do you meet that service?
10. What kind of stories do you cover? Why?
11. Do you keep your audience in mind when selecting stories? How?
12. Please describe your story selection process (as a writer, as an editor.)
13. What are your favorite stories to cover? Why?
14. What are the stories that you think best meet your audience's needs? Why?
15. What are the least interesting stories for your audience? Why?

