DEFINING THE SOUTHERN IN *SOUTHERN LIVING*

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

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by
MEGAN NORRIS JONES

Jan Colbert, Thesis Supervisor

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

DEFINING THE SOUTHERN IN *SOUTHERN LIVING*

Presented by Megan Norris Jones,
A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

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

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Professor Jan Colbert

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Professor Mark Carroll

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Professor John Fennell

_____
Professor Jennifer Rowe

DEDICATION

For Matt, through all these years we spent apart and

now all the years we'll spend together. I love you.

For my mother, who made me finish and who made finishing possible.

Thank you. I love you, too.

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Megan Norris Jones

Jan Colbert, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine (1) the editors' definition of the term "Southern" as it is presented in the pages of *Southern Living* magazine and (2) whether that definition originates with the magazine's readers and is merely reflected back to them in the magazine or whether it originates with the editorial staff and is then disseminated through the magazine. These questions are researched using two methods: content analysis of the magazine during the years 2005 and 2006 and interviews with editors at the magazine. The time period was chosen because it marks the 40th anniversary of the magazine's publication along with a redesign. The editors' definition of Southerness is determined to be (1) pertaining to a geographic region known as the South, and (2) conveying a sense of comfort through food, people, places, and even plants with which readers in the defined region are familiar. The origination of this definition is the readership itself.

INTRODUCTION

Regional magazines, such as *Southern Living*, exist within the magazine industry as a specialized subset whose readers fit a regional, not national, profile. Because these magazines target audiences based on geography and local culture, they must be responsive to the demands specific to their region. These magazines, however, might also serve a trendsetting role within their regions as they publish stories that define the region that they cover. The purpose of this study is to determine how *Southern Living*, one regional magazine, establishes its regional identity. (1) How does the magazine define "Southern," and how does it apply that definition in its editorial content? (2) Is that definition a reflection of readers' views, or does the magazine define Southerness for its readers?

The relationship between *Southern Living* and the South is likely an interdependent one in which the magazine draws its content ideas from the interests of local culture while simultaneously infusing that culture with the magazine's own ideas about what Southern culture ought to be. It is important to note that it is not necessary for either *Southern Living*'s image of the South or the South's image of itself to be accurate. As long as the image is appealing and rooted in its audience's self-perception, the magazine's popularity will remain.

Diffusion theory provides a framework for examining how *Southern Living*, as a regional magazine, influences or is influenced by Southern culture. By looking at the way regional characteristics are used in the magazine, this study discusses how the idea of

Southerness influences the magazine's content. Both content analysis of the magazine and interviews with its editors offer insight into the magazine as a reflection or definer of Southern culture.

Southern Living was chosen because, throughout literature on regional publications, it has been held up as the model for a successful regional magazine. *Southern Living* was founded in 1966 by Emory Cunningham to target the changing South and an increasingly urbanized audience.[1] Its initial press run was 256,000, and the magazine began making a profit within 18 months.[2] The magazine was an offshoot of *Progressive Farmer* magazine, a regional agricultural magazine founded in 1886, and the two magazines made up Southern Progress Corporation.[3] In 1985, Southern Progress was purchased by Time Inc for $480 million, at the time the highest price ever paid for a magazine company.[4]

Over the years, various magazines and subsidiaries have been under Southern Progress control. Currently Southern Progress publishes *Southern Living, Cooking Light, Health, Coastal Living, Southern Accents,* and *Sunset* magazines. The company also owns Oxmoor House, its book-publishing arm; Southern Living At Home, a direct-sales group; SPC Digital, which oversees the Web sites MyRecipes.com and MyHomeIdeas.com; and a custom-publishing arm.[5] All of these, with the exception of *Sunset* are based in the Birmingham, Alabama, headquarters. *Sunset*, a regional magazine

[1] David Davies, "Southern Living" in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines,* eds. Kathleen L. Endres, Therese L. Lueck, (Greenwood: Westport, Connecticut, 1995), 347.
[2] Ibid, 348.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Southern Progress Web site, www.southernprogress.com

for the West, is based in Menlo Park, California.[6] As of January 2009, the magazine advertised a rate base of 2,800,000 with 16,176,000 readers, 77 percent of whom are female, 23 percent male. The median household income is $64,604; 67 percent are married; and 82 percent are homeowners.[7]

During the period examined in this study, the Magazine Publisher's Association listed *Southern Living* as 19th in average subscription circulation for the top 100 Audit Bureau of Circulations magazines with more than 2.7 million for 2005.[8] It has the fourth highest average subscription circulation of any Time Inc. magazine, with only *Time, People,* and *Sports Illustrated* ahead.[9] The 2008 circulation for *Southern Living* was 2.8 million.[10]

Although the magazine does have some subscribers outside of the South, the vast majority of its circulation is located in the Southeast.[11] The magazine provides information on state-by-state readership because it sells advertisements in state packages. Some states, however, are combined for the purposes of those packages. The non-Southern states listed are either grouped under the heading of "Midwest" or are grouped with Maryland. The readership breakdown by state is Alabama (165,000); Arkansas and Missouri (120,000); Florida (260,000); Georgia (260,000); Kentucky and West Virginia (110,000); Louisiana (85,000); Maryland, Washington, D.C., Delaware, New Jersey,

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[6] *Sunset* Web site, www.sunset.com/contact-us/
[7] *Southern Living*'s 2009 Direct Response Rate Card, img4.southernliving.com/static/pdf/2009_directresp_ratecard.pdf
[8] Magazine Publishers of America, "Average circulation for top 100 ABC magazines," http://www.magazine.org/consumer_marketing/circ_trends/16117.aspx
[9] Ibid.
[10] Magazine Publishers of America; http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER_MARKETING/CIRC_TRENDS/ABC2008TOTALrank.aspx
[11] *Southern Living,* Online Rate Card, http://www.southernliving.com/magazine/online-media-kit-00400000036267/

New York, and Pennsylvania (190,000); Mississippi (85,000); Midwest, including Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin (165,000); North Carolina (240,000); Oklahoma (55,000); South Carolina (135,000); Tennessee (175,000); Texas (370,000); Virginia (175,000).[12] Most (93 percent) of its readership are also subscribers. Newsstand sales accounted for little more than 200,000 of its average 2.7 million circulation in the first six months of 2005.[13] This is a regional publication with the circulation strength of a national magazine. Its ability to attract a large and faithful readership signals the success of its editorial mix and the effectiveness with which it secures its regional identity.

This study of *Southern Living* will add to existing knowledge about the role of this magazine within Southern culture, but it will also add to the understanding of how a regional magazine can define or be defined by the region that it represents. Past scholarship on city and regional magazines has looked for common traits shared by city and regional magazines across geographic boundaries. This study, on the other hand, will specifically examine how one magazine has defined itself as uniquely Southern.

This study will also expand diffusion research, a need that was noted by Gary Meyer in his 2004 article "Diffusion Methodology: Time to Innovate?" when he wrote that a qualitative researcher "may discover important new explanatory variables that had not been considered in the study and for that matter that had not been considered in past diffusion studies either."[14] Qualitative methods, such as interviewing, allow the

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[12] *Southern Living*, Online Rate Card, http://www.southernliving.com/magazine/online-media-kit-00400000036267/

[13] Magazine Publishers of America http://www.magazine.org/circulation/circulation_trends_and_magazine_handbook/13224.cfm

[14] Gary Meyer, "Diffusion Methodology: Time to Innovate?" *Journal of Health Communication* 9, (2004): 68.

researcher to have direct access to the process under study and so can bring the nuances of a situation to light. They also allow for undirected responses that may expand the previously existing notions of diffusion research because participants will not be limited to answers already conceived by the researcher.

This study is important because it examines both the creative process and the end product of the magazine. The interviews delve into what the editors intend to create, and the content analysis looks at what they actually do create. In April of 2006, the magazine launched a redesign that coincided with its 40th anniversary. Because this was a transition at a significant time in the magazine's history, this study examines the 2005 year leading up to the anniversary and redesign to establish a basis for the magazine and then the 2006 year to also take into account how the magazine changed.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research in the field of city and regional magazines lays the groundwork for understanding the role of *Southern Living* in the South. It is also necessary to look at the patterns through which trends develop at a given magazine. The most suitable theory for approaching this process is diffusion theory.

Because *Southern Living* defines its region as the South, this study looks at the ways that it defines the concept of Southerness for its readers and where it derives that definition, either internally by taking a leadership role in defining Southerness for people in the South, or externally, by reflecting to readers their own definition of Southerness. The focus is on editorial content, that is, how editors decide the type of stories that the magazine will publish, and the methodologies are content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Diffusion Theory

The social-system element of diffusion theory is vital to this study because it includes not only the particular social system contained within the magazine staff but also the city or region that the magazine serves. *Southern Living* has a regional base, the magazine is located in the area it serves, and members of the magazine staff are members of that community: Birmingham, Alabama. As Rogers notes in *Diffusion of Innovations*, "When they share common meanings, a mutual subcultural language, and are alike in personal and social characteristics, the communication of ideas is likely to have greater effects in terms of knowledge gain, attitude formation and change, and overt behavior

change."[15] Therefore, the social system of the community in which a magazine is located must be taken into account as a channel for communication of ideas.

In addition to examining communication diffusion theory, Rogers also explores the diffusion of innovations in organizations, a topic of particular relevance to the study of magazines (themselves organizations) and a topic that is less well-researched than diffusion theories relating to individuals. Rogers divides the innovation process in organizations into (1) the initiation stage, including agenda setting and matching, and (2) the implementation stage including redefining/restructuring, clarifying, and routinizing.[16]

Diffusion theory was first used to explore agricultural innovation, so Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne A. Danielson's 1960 article "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story" was the first of its kind in media diffusion research and consequently served as the model for future studies exploring the topic. [17] This study deals with the influence that media have on readers/viewers and the ways in which that influence is spread throughout a population. At the time of their study, Deutschmann and Danielson found that media such as television and radio offer the most immediate information while newspapers and opinion leaders offer supplemental information. This study is significant because it is an early example of diffusion theory as it relates to the media and because it establishes a direction of influence in the interaction between media and audience.

Another important aspect of diffusion research, and one particularly relevant to this review, is the direction of influence. In other words, who influences whom? Steven

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[15] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1983), 19.
[16] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 370.
[17] Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne A. Danielson. "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story," *Journalism Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1960): 355.

H. Chaffee explores the effectiveness of mass media versus interpersonal communication in the decision and adoption processes of individuals in "Mass Media and Interpersonal Channels: Competitive, Convergent or Complementary?" [18] Beginning with the premise that interpersonal communication is preferable, Chaffee's study actually finds that neither route is innately preferable over the other. Rather, people determine their channels of information based on the accessibility of each channel and the likelihood that each presents of gaining good information. This point is important because it implies that media sources that can offer easily accessible, accurate information can play a major role in decision and innovation-adoption processes among individuals.

Although the direction of influence on city and regional magazines has not been studied specifically, both magazines and influence have been studied separately. These studies provide perspective for the central question: What entities exert the greatest influence on city and regional magazines? Do these magazines set the trends for their readers, or do they simply follow local trends? None of the previous studies answer these questions. Instead, they leave a neat hole for future research to fill. Diffusion theory is the vehicle for filling that hole as it examines the spread of innovations and trends.

This study of diffusion of ideas at *Southern Living* magazine will begin the process of unraveling the relationships and channels of communication that exist between the magazine and the region it serves. Because this web of relationship is complex, this study will begin the process by examining the direction of influence in defining the

[18] Chaffee, Steven H. "Mass Media and Interpersonal Channels: Competitive, Convergent or Complementary?" in *Inter/Media*, edited by Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart, 57-77. (New York: Oxford UP, 1982), 72.

concept of Southerness within the pages of *Southern Living* magazine. The relationship examined is between reader and editor in determining content. A clearer understanding of this relationship will provide insight into the editorial processes of the magazine and place it within the appropriate context in the magazine industry.

City and Regional Magazines

The literature surrounding city and regional magazines, though not voluminous, has been developed by a few key scholars. Their articles range from the business to the editorial side of the magazine, examining magazines' target audiences and their role within the media at large. The books and articles examined here offer an overview of the development of the genre over time as well as insight into the current understanding of the role of city and regional magazines, with the older articles laying the groundwork upon which more recent research has been built.

One such article is "City Magazines Find Niche in Media Marketplace" by Alan D. Fletcher. [19] In this article, Fletcher outlines the city magazine's role in the national magazine industry and its struggle to carve out its own piece of the publishing pie. He found that such magazines believe that they fill a void left by other media, such as newspapers, broadcast stations, and national magazines. Fletcher's study establishes city magazines as an emerging and significant segment of the magazine industry.

Ernest Hynds published "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways," an article that evaluates the role of city magazines as possible alternatives to newspapers

[19] Alan D. Fletcher, "City Magazines Find Niche in Media Marketplace," *Journalism Quarterly*. 54, no. 4 (1977): 741–742.

in presenting major issues to the public.[20] Although it is possible for magazines to fill this role, Hynds concludes that such a role is not their purpose. City magazines, instead, focus on local interest stories, culture, people and entertainment. He writes, "Some city magazines are engaged in aggressive journalism, including investigative reporting, but most tend to emphasize providing information about lifestyles and the good life for their generally affluent audiences."[21] Hynds' study places city magazines within their context as service providers and trendsetters but not as change agents within a community.[22]

City and regional magazines saw a period of growth throughout the 1970s when the previous articles were written, so in 1981, John P. Hayes conducted a survey, "City/Regional Magazines: A Survey/Census," to determine how these magazines obtain their editorial content and why editors of these publications believed the genre was experiencing such growth.[23] The findings showed that city and regional magazines depended heavily on freelance writers to fill their editorial content. Editors also responded with four factors that they felt contributed to the success of their magazines. These factors were (1) local pride, (2) the failure of newspapers to offer readers what they want, (3) the abilities of such publications to attract affluent readers and, therefore, advertisers and (4) greater free time and money for readers to spend.[24] This study is important because it reveals a portion of the magazines' editorial process and the

[20] Ernest C. Hynds, "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways." *Journalism Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1979).
[21] Ernest C. Hynds, "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways," 622.
[22] Ibid.
[23] John P.Hayes, "City/Regional Magazines: A Survey/Census," *Journalism Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (1981): 294-296.
[24] Ibid.

significance of freelance work and because it gives specific reasons for the emergence of the genre.

As the genre of city and regional magazines developed, researchers turned their attention to subcategories within the genre. One such researcher is Sam G. Riley who published "Specialized Magazines of the South"[25] in *Journalism Quarterly* and then published the book *Magazines of the American South.*[26] The book elaborates on Riley's earlier study of specialized magazines in the South. Whereas that study focused on the genre as a whole, Riley now breaks apart generalizations by examining individual publications in the genre. These profiles also give weight to publications that were significant in the development of regional magazines in the South, adding a richer historical perspective to the field and to this study.[27]

In the volume *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States,* Riley and co-author Gary W. Selnow overview the genre of city and regional magazines by examining the individual magazines, such as *Southern Living,* that fall into this category.[28] Riley and Selnow also established definitions for types of magazines within this larger category: (1) city magazines, (2) regional magazines, (3) city specialty magazines and (4) regional specialty magazines.[29] *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States* is a valuable tool for any study of city and regional magazines because of both the depth and specificity of each magazine profile.

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[25] Sam G. Riley, "Specialized Magazines of the South," *Journalism Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (1982): 447-450, 455.
[26] Sam G. Riley, *Magazines of the American South*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).
[27] Ibid.
[28] Sam G. Riley and Gary W. Selnow, *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).
[29] Ibid., ix.

Both *Magazines of the American South* and *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States* contain sections on *Southern Living.* The article is essentially the same in both volumes, the only differences being updated figures and dates to account for the five years separating their publication. In *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States,* Riley describes *Southern Living* as a magazine whose "readers are more in sync with the traditional middle-class, Southern Protestant values of being able to 'do for yourself.'"[30] Developed out of a department in *Progressive Farmer* called "Southern Living," the magazine set out to capture readers from among the increasingly urbanized South.[31] According to Riley, the magazine makes a conscious editorial decision to "leave controversy and unpleasantness to the newspapers and to accentuate the positive in covering their region."[32] The magazine is a lifestyle publication that divides its editorial content among travel (around the South), gardening, home decorating and renovating, and cooking.

David Davies approaches *Southern Living* as a women's magazine rather than a regional magazine in his article on the magazine in the book, *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*.[33] Despite the focus dictated by the topic of the book, the article on *Southern Living* also specifically mentions how the magazine's responsiveness to its readers shapes its content and success by quoting Time Inc's reasoning for acquiring the publication:

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[30] Sam G. Riley and Gary Selnow, *Regional Interest Magazines of the United States*, 291.
[31] Ibid., 289-290.
[32] Ibid., 290.
[33] David Davies, "Southern Living" in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres, Therese L. Lueck, (Greenwood: Westport, Connecticut, 1995), 347–350.

> "As Time Inc. president J. Richard Munro put it in 1985, the Southern Progress Corp. magazines 'have achieved success because their staffs are close to their readers, recognize their needs and serve them more effectively than the national magazines with which they compete.'"[34]

According to this view, the Southerness of the editors and their responsiveness to readers are fundamental to the success of the magazine.

Diane Roberts takes a more analytical view of the culture represented by *Southern Living* in her book chapter "Living Southern in *Southern Living*."[35] She sees *Southern Living* as a how-to guide on being Southern. She writes, "And if some readers are not precisely mirrored in *Southern Living*'s pages, they see what they aspire to be. The magazine teaches those who aren't from the region, or aren't quite as polished as their neighbours [sic], how to be an upper-middle-class Southerner."[36] As for the perennially positive outlook the magazine maintains on all things Southern, Roberts suggests that the magazine serves as a shelter where troubling social issues of race, class and poverty can be ignored.[37] As she writes, "the magazine acts as a refuge from the unlovely realities of the region it sets out to define and ameliorate."[38]

Along these lines, Roberts also begins teasing out a definition of Southerness that is portrayed in *Southern Living*. She notes that the magazine avoids political issues by focusing purely on the domestic side of life, but she also suggests that this "insistence on

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[34] David Davies, "Southern Living" in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, 348.
[35] Diane Roberts, "Living Southern in *Southern Living*," in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, edited by Richard H. King and Helen Taylor. (New York: NYU, 1996).
[36] Diane Roberts, "Living Southern in *Southern Living*," 87.
[37] Ibid., 86.
[38] Ibid.

a bourgeois Eden is itself a Southern characteristic."[39] She notes the advertisements and photo placements of china and silver, two Southern obsessions, as well as the traditional Louisiana or Williamsburg architecture of *Southern Living* homes.[40] Even the word "home," used instead of "house," connotes community and Southerness. Other cultural definitions that Roberts notes in the magazine are "college football (there's an annual poll), gardening, family recipes, entertaining, sports such as hunting and fishing, weddings, home improvement and travel."[41] This editorial mix has endeared the magazine to readers and elevated it to the position of "the most successful and comprehensive arbiter of taste and style for the region it perpetually defines and defends."[42]

Perhaps the most comprehensive look at Southern culture is the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris of the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture.[43] In its section on the media, the *Encyclopedia* looks specifically at *Southern Living* in an article by John Shelton Reed. Here, Reed observes that all features in the magazine are not exclusively Southern in content but that the magazine emphasizes its Southern elements through its travel section and through incorporating phrases such as "A traditional part of Southern hospitality …" or "In the South, we have always …" into its articles.[44] Reed suggests that

[39] Ibid., 91.
[40] Ibid., 94-95.
[41] Ibid., 95.
[42] Ibid., 96.
[43] Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds. *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, (Chapel Hill: UNC, 1989).
[44] John Shelton Reed, "Southern Living," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (Chapel Hill: UNC, 1989), 974.

the magazine's apolitical stance might be a source of its success among a readership "unaccustomed to seeing their region praised in glossy magazines."[45] Unlike Roberts, however, Reed sees *Southern Living* as reflecting the region instead of defining it as he writes, "it reflects its readers' sensibilities and seldom attempts to shape them, except by an occasional nudge."[46]

Aside from these articles and books, several graduate students in the Missouri School of Journalism have researched the area of city and regional magazines. Kevin D. Shoesmith's thesis, "Regional Magazines: Editorial and Business Philosophies," examines the role that magazine ownership plays in editorial content.[47] For this study, he divided ownership categories into state, independent, and corporate. [48] He found that, rather than the ownership, the editor played the most significant part in determining the magazine's character. The demands of the business are automatically factors into the editor's decision-making processes because of the basic need to keep the magazine publishing, so outside pressure from owners usually is not necessary.[49] Shoesmith's thesis is important because it explores possible channels of influence within regional magazine structures that could factor into the process of diffusion of ideas.

Diane L. Mossholder's thesis, "Patterns of Success: Three Regional Magazines," on the other hand, looks specifically at the content of three notable regional magazines—*Southern Living*, *Sunset*, and *Yankee*—to determine if certain patterns emerge that link

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Kevin D. Shoesmith, "Regional Magazines: Editorial and Business Philosophies," (Masters thesis, University of Missouri, 1992).
[48] Ibid., 47–48.
[49] Kevin D. Shoesmith, "Regional Magazines: Editorial and Business Philosophies," 140.

regional magazines to norms within the genre that surmount the influence of their individual regions.[50] Although she does see certain similarities among the publications in areas such as declining page counts and seasonal peaks, generalizations about more specific content qualities are harder to draw.[51] The significance of this study lies in its examination of the direction of influence on regional magazines. That influence could either travel from the particular region to the magazine or from national trends to the magazine. The study could not draw definite conclusions, but the information that it did collect is an important component in the larger picture of idea diffusion in city and regional magazines.

A third thesis, "Qualities of Excellence in City and Regional Magazines," also sought to identify characteristics of success in city and regional magazines.[52] To do so, Renee Martin Kratzer surveyed 107 city and regional magazines and found that qualities of excellence include a personality reflective of the particular region represented by the magazine, stories on local issues, prominent and unusual photography, accuracy, quality design, and appealing covers.[53] Kratzer's study is significant because it, too, links the quality of city and regional magazines to a national standard separate from the standards of the city or region served by the magazine itself. These standards, however, remain closely linked to the region that each magazine covers.

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[50] Diane L. Mossholder, "Patterns of Success: Three Regional Magazines." (Masters thesis, University of Missouri, 1994), 9.
[51] Ibid, 96-97.
[52] Renee Martin Kratzer, "Qualities of Excellence in City and Regional Magazines," (Masters thesis, University of Missouri, 1999).
[53] Ibid., 161.

All of the previous studies have laid a solid foundation of research on city and regional magazines, but the field is far from full. Rather, many questions remain to be answered or even to be asked. The direction of idea diffusion in such magazines is an important step in understanding how their editorial content is shaped.

Critique of other studies

Research on city and regional magazines has consistently used quantitative methodology, particularly surveys, to study the genre. Consequently, the research has not been able to provide much in-depth insight to the editorial processes of the city and regional magazines. Instead, it skims over the surface layer by simply documenting survey responses without asking further questions or observing the processes first-hand.

One such study, entitled "Numbers Grow, Problems Remain for City Magazines," uses the survey method to ask editors of city and regional magazines about their staff, competition, and problems to determine how the editors view the roles of their magazines within the industry.[54] While the study does include charts and numbers showing circulation growth, it also includes quotes from the surveys of various editors. This technique approaches a more personalized and qualitative method and grounds the study in specifics, much as a semi-structured interview would, though, unfortunately, without the same depth. The study shows that most editors feel their magazines appeal to local interest and fill a gap left by local newspapers and national magazines.[55]

[54] Alan D. Fletcher and Bruce G. Vanden Bergh. "Numbers Grow, Problems Remain for City Magazines," *Journalism Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1982).
[55] Ibid., 316.

As mentioned earlier, the study "Specialized Magazines of the South" used quantitative methods for studying city and regional magazines and also incorporates some interviewing and participant observation into the process, though on a more informal level than the quantitative methods.[56] Riley first wrote "Specialized Magazines of the South" because he noticed a lack of research on both regional magazines in general and Southern magazines in particular, and he sought to fill that gap.[57] In the article, he breaks categories of magazines covered in the study into city magazines, regional specialty magazines, and regional magazines.[58] His study notes that, though many local magazines were started in the 1970s, most maintain relatively low circulation. Riley speculates that in a modern market focused on highly specialized publications, perhaps mere geographic specialization is not enough. He writes, "Perhaps regional specialization alone is not enough in every case, and a more narrow focusing of subject matter is needed."[59]

Riley conducted this study by compiling a listing of city and regional magazines and by mailing questionnaires to editors and publishers of 68 magazines. The results were then filtered through his personal experience as a regional magazine editor and through conversations with other editors.[60] This incorporation of his own experience alludes to the methodology of participant observation, and his conversations with editors are similar to unstructured or semi-structured interviewing. Although Riley did not rank these qualitative approaches as his primary methodology, they certainly added depth and

[56] Sam G. Riley, "Specialized Magazines of the South," 447.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 448.
[59] Sam G. Riley, "Specialized Magazines of the South," 449.
[60] Ibid., 447.

perspective to his study that mere surveys would have lacked. Such a mixed methods approach is beneficial because it offers both numbers and personal insight. An even more thorough study of the particular processes at work within these magazines could have been accomplished with more use of qualitative methodologies, but Riley's study provides a good start for research in this vein. His evaluation of city and regional magazines within the larger industry context provides a closer look at a particular subset of the city and regional genre than had been available through previous, mostly quantitative studies.

A good methodological example of interviewing and non-participant observation that does not deal directly with city and regional magazines but that does look at the selection of editorial content is a case study entitled "Daily newspaper editor's audience construction routines."[61] In this study Randall S. Sumpter observed the workings of a daily newspaper for a period of six weeks and also interviews the editors who proved most influential in shaping the editorial content of the newspaper.[62] The results of the study showed that editors did not select editorial content based on definitions of newsworthiness or personal advancement.[63] Instead, they constructed theoretical audiences to whom they responded by providing editorial content to meet anticipated needs.[64] This study shows the influence of a community on a publication's editorial content. City magazines are located within a similar community context, so some of the results discovered in this instance might be applicable to other publications.

[61] Randall S. Sumpter, "Daily newspaper editor's audience construction routines," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 17, no. 3 (2000), Factiva.
[62] Ibid., 3.
[63] Ibid., 1.
[64] Ibid., 1.

This study provides greater depth of insight than either of the previous two studies mentioned because the researcher actually steps into the environment he is studying and engages with his subjects. This personal interaction adds layers of meaning and significance that are lost in the more distanced quantitative approach of surveying. Sumpter did not engage fully in participant observation, but rather elected to remain an outsider in the situation. This decision probably more firmly established his objectivity, but at the same time, his presence as an outsider might have altered the process in a way that his presence as a participant would not have. This trade-off is part of the compromise of conducting research. It is simply necessary for the research to consider the possible consequences of either decision while constructing the study.

Each of these three studies used different methodological approaches to the subject at hand, and each variety of approach produced different results than would have been discovered had some other method been used. The same research questions could be asked again, and applying different research methods would produce new layers of understanding and meaning to incorporate into the body of knowledge that is building around the diffusion of innovations to city and regional magazines.

METHODOLOGY

The research methods for this study are content analysis and semi-structured interviewing. The dual methodologies of interviewing and content analysis also feed into each other as the discoveries of one process refine the techniques of the other. Initial readings of the magazines provide a basis for initial interviews, and the responses from those interviews refine the approach to the content analysis. This research seeks to answer the questions: (1) How does *Southern Living* define "Southern"? and (2) Does *Southern Living* define Southerness for its readers, or does *Southern Living* reflect its readers' preconceived notions of Southerness?

Content Analysis

Content analysis can be purely quantitative, purely qualitative, or it can use a combination of both approaches. This study uses the third option of combination, as described by Bruce L. Berg in *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*.[65]

Peter Larsen in "Media Contents: Textual Analysis of Fictional Media Content," suggests analyzing "what are arguably significant examples from a larger corpus of texts" as a method for managing the large amount of text available for analysis.[66] In considering which texts would represent significant examples of *Southern Living*'s approach to the idea of Southerness, two options were considered. The first option was to take a historical look at the magazine and select issues from years significant in the magazine's

[65] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, (Boston: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1989).
[66] Peter Larsen, "Media Contents: Textual Analysis of Fictional Media Content," in *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies*, edited by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski, (London: Routledge, 1991), 121–134.

development, such as 1966, the year it was founded, or 1985, the year it was purchased by Time Inc.[67] The second option was to focus on *Southern Living* in its more recent form and to examine a few recent years of significance to the magazine.

This approach is most suitable for the purposes of this study for two reasons. (1) The interviews conducted with editors at the magazine should complement the content analysis. The current editors can only provide information on their current perspective on the magazine. Therefore, content analysis of historical issues would veer off track if interpreted through the lens of current editors. (2) This study of how one regional magazine incorporates regional identity into its publication should be useful to other regional magazines that wish to appeal to their regions. While information gathered on one specific region cannot be translated directly into another region, certain perspectives and approaches might be instructive. Another magazine, however, cannot spontaneously develop a 40-year history, so a look at contemporary techniques would be most useful for those interested in how regional appeal is established. With these considerations in mind, the years 2005 and 2006 were selected for analysis because this period marks a transition in the magazine as it celebrates its 40th anniversary and implements a redesign in 2006. The year 2005 is included to place any changes in context.

Textual analysis takes information—in the form of text—that already exists and illuminates it by directly discussing concepts that previously only had been implied. In this methodology, the text serves as a starting block for conversation on a larger theme.[68] Teun A. van Dijk described the hierarchical schema as "consisting of such conventional

[67] Diane Roberts, "Living Southern at *Southern Living*," 87.
[68] Brenda Edgerton-Webster, J8008 Qualitative Research Methods class discussion, March 15, 2005.

categories as Headline, Lead (together forming the Summary), Main Events, Context, History (together forming the Background category), Verbal Reactions, and Comments."[69] An author might rely on readers' previous knowledge to evoke corresponding knowledge that can then be used in other, subtle forms throughout a piece. Van Dijk comments on this technique when he writes:

> "Our shared, social knowledge of such scripts provides the numerous 'missing links' between the concepts and propositions of the text, which is, so to speak, a semantic iceberg of which only the tip is actually expressed, whereas the other information is presupposed to be known by the readers."[70]

This practice, however, can cause confusion between the message as understood by its creator and the understanding created by the readers who receive it. As van Dijk warns, "This dependence on world knowledge and beliefs also may make coherence subjective and ideological: what is coherent for the journalist may not be so for all readers."[71] Also, the style in which a piece is written is key to understanding the themes of the story. As van Dijk writes, "Style is the textual result of choices between alternative ways of saying more or less the same thing by using different words or a different syntactic structure."[72]

Establishing Content to Be Analyzed

Berg notes that content analysis can take place at many levels, including words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, sections, chapters, and books.[73] In this analysis of *Southern Living*, the level of the individual article is the unit of analysis. Because

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[69] Teun A. van Dijk, "Media contents: The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse," in *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*, eds. Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski, (Routledge: London, 1991), 114–115.
[70] Ibid., 112.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Teun A. van Dijk, "Media contents: The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse," 115–116.
[73] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*.

Southern Living segments its magazines by state and region within the South and because 25 issues of magazines from both Mississippi and Alabama editions were used in this analysis, it was necessary to determine which articles constitute a standard issue. As a result, I omitted special "Livings" sections that were state-specific, such as Alabama Living, and pages designated with special state-specific numberings, such as "AL2" or "MS4." Because this customization is a vital part of the magazine that speaks to its effectiveness in reaching its region's readers, I delve into its importance during the interviewing portion of the research so as to gain insight into the entire customization process, not simply as it relates to Alabama or Mississippi. In the mean time, for clarity and consistency, those sections were omitted from content analysis.

Components Analyzed: Page Number

In order to establish an effective and consistent way to conduct the analysis of each article, a form was developed and then filled out for each article in the magazine (See Appendix A). The form begins with an identification line asking for the month, year, starting page number, and number of pages of each article. The pages are counted in whole numbers and not fractionals. This means that a story that appears as two half pages (with advertisements on the other halves of the pages) would be recorded as two pages because its text stretches over that many numbered pages. The length of text would not be added to make one page.

Components Analyzed: Structure

Next, the form asks for the structure of the story, whether it is a feature well, department, or special section story. *Southern Living* is divided primarily into four major

departments: Travel, Garden, Food, and Home. Each of those departments is usually represented in the form of a larger story in the Feature Well, which is situated in the middle of the magazine. In addition, there are smaller departments, such as Southword or the Directories, scattered among the sections. Lastly, most issues contain Special Sections, such as Healthy Living, Southern Home Awards, or Weekend Living, that vary from issue to issue. If the Special Sections option is marked, the name of that section is also noted.

Next, the specific type of story is listed, breaking it into the magazine's pre-established classifications of Travel, Garden, Food, Home, Southword, or Directory. This classification is easily accomplished, as the department stories are listed under these heads in the table of contents. The Feature Well stories generally include at least one of each type. As for the Special Section stories, those are labeled according to their type when the name of the special section was listed above, and, if they fit into the set categories, that type is marked accordingly. For example, "Southern Home Awards" is the name of a Special Section and would be written in the blank beside the designation for Special Section. The stories within this section, however, are also Homes stories, so they would be marked as such on the form. The special section "Healthy Living," would be recorded alongside the designation for special section. Some stories within the section, a healthy recipe, for example, fit into the listed types, and so that would be marked. Other stories, however, would be unique to the section and so the "type" field would be left unmarked.

Components Analyzed: Defining "Personal"

After these basic questions are answered, the form moves into areas that require more definition. The next question asks if the story is personal, meaning it includes the stories of real people and not just decorating ideas or nice spots to visit. Quotes from experts giving information are not considered personal, but business owners giving personal information about their shops and restaurants are considered personal. First-person narrative from the author is not considered personal either. Rather, the article should include a quote or should feature the home, business or life of a person listed by name in the article because the purpose of this question is to determine if the article incorporates local personality into the story beyond that of basic service journalism.

For example, a travel story about Columbia, Missouri, that includes an interview with a local resident or business owner would be considered personal. That same story without the local interview and instead with only the author's first-person suggestions of good restaurants would not be personal because it does not introduce any personality to the story outside of the writer's and so could easily have been written in third person. A gardening story about azaleas that included information about the species from a horticulturist would not be personal. A gardening story set in a named individual's garden would be personal.

Components Analyzed: Topic

The next question asks for a brief phrase summarizing the topic, such as "Rosedown Plantation, LA" or "How to make a wreath." This serves as a record of the types of topics covered and an indication of the range of stories within each type. For

example, the topics covered by travel stories could indicate the geographic range covered by the magazine, as well as how often certain areas were covered.

Components Analyzed: People in Photography

Next, the form asks if there are people in the photos. The original thought had been to note how often "real people" (as opposed to models) appeared in the stories, in hopes of understanding the extent to which the magazine's visual cues are as local as its content. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that there was no way to tell which photos were from shoots of the people in the stories and which were models. In fact, I soon learned that most non-"real" people in the photographs were actually staff members taking part in photo shoots. These people were not professional models and would look as ordinary as regular people featured in other photographs, so I decided instead to note how often the stories featured pictures of people as opposed to informational pieces featuring simply the food or the project discussed in the article. An article on building a deck can be informational, but an article on a particular family's deck, with photographs of the family on the deck, is a much more personal approach. Photographs with people are an indication of the magazine's focus is on the people of the South as opposed to tourist destinations or home-decorating tips.

Components Analyzed: Southern Location

The form then asks if the location of the story is given as Southern, and I use the magazine's own definition of Southern states for that assessment. They include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West

Virginia, and Washington, D.C. If any mention of one of these locations appears in the article, it is coded as having a Southern location.

Components Analyzed: Use of the Word “South”

Next, it is noted if the article includes any word with "South" as its root, including “South,” "Southern," or "Southerner." This element is only recorded if the word is used to refer to the region, the South. The southern wall of the garden or a reference to South Carolina would not count toward the tally of the term “South.” Mentioning Southern football, hospitality in the South, or a Southerner from birth are all examples that count toward the tally.

Components Analyzed: Comments

The form ends with a few lines for comments. This part of the form is particularly qualitative because it allows information that might not fit into the structure of the formal analysis to come to light if it is especially interesting or pertinent. For example, a Feature Well story about a Louisiana writer that describes how he's named all the live oaks in his yard after Confederate generals doesn’t necessarily register on the regular list of questions. It would simply get credit for having a Southern location. That detail, however, is particularly Southern and indicative of the magazine’s personality and ability to capture the essence of its region. As such, it is important information that will be recorded in the comments section of the analysis form.

Analysis Technique

After all the information is recorded for all the articles in the 2005 and 2006 issues, the information is put into a database and each data point is analyzed by section,

and then all of the sections are compared by data points. The number of pages per section, the number of stories per section, the average number of pages per story, the range of length in stories, and the percentage of stories including personal reference, people in photography, Southern location, or some form of the word "South" are recorded. In addition, these factors are all examined by year, and any changes from 2005 to the redesign in 2006 are also noted.

Interviewing

Because, as Larsen notes "[a] conclusion emerging from recent work is that textual analysis in itself is not a sufficient basis for characterizing the interaction between texts and audiences," [74] the additional methodology of interviewing is necessary to complement the findings of the content analysis.

The technique used for this thesis is semi-structured interviewing. As Fontana and Frey write, "[Interviewing] can be used for the purpose of measurement or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective."[75] Fontana and Frey then go on to lay out seven steps to conducting interviews: accessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondents, deciding on how to present oneself, locating an informant, gaining trust, establishing rapport, and collecting empirical materials.[76]

The process of conducting these semi-structured interviews requires a researcher to sift through the layers of the subjects' experience. Each opinion and action is likely formed by a complex network of interacting experiences and knowledge that create layers

[74] Peter Larsen, "Media Contents: Textual Analysis of Fictional Media Content," 129.
[75] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "Interviewing: The Art of Science," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 361.
[76] Ibid., 366–368.

of meaning for the subject under study. Sorting through those layers requires a researcher to examine "a creative process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value," as Clifford Christians and James Carey described the heart of qualitative research.[77] In the qualitative tradition of the unstructured interview, the researcher must seek to understand the individual interviewee's perspective that Fontana and Frey refer to in their article on interviewing.[78]

The importance of this relationship between interviewer and interviewee is a reflection of a shift in qualitative research, noted by Fontana and Frey, toward a focus on developing a relationship with the participant.[79] More traditional research approaches call for a more distanced relationship in which the interviewer is "casual and friendly" yet still "directive and impersonal."[80]

A semi-structured interview strikes a balance between the rigidity of a fully structured interview and the unfocused nature of the unstructured interview. A semi-structured interview requires the researcher to select a particular topic for discussion and then to build the interview around that topic. If an interview is unstructured, the researcher must refrain from "imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry."[81]

Ethical considerations surrounding interviewing include the informed consent of the interviewees, the interviewee's right to privacy, and protecting the interviewee from

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[77] Glifford G. Christians and James W. Carey, "The Logic and Aims of Qualitative Research," in *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, eds Guido H. Stempel and Bruce H. Westley, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 359.
[78] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "Interviewing: The Art of Science," 361.
[79] Ibid., 363.
[80] Ibid., 364.
[81] Ibid., 366.

harm. Another important debate is whether covert fieldwork is acceptable. All of these factors must be weighed carefully before the researcher approaches the subject and constructs the interview setting.[82] John Pauly states that qualitative researchers are not overly concerned with differentiating between underlying motives and later rationalizations of action.[83] This unconcern is important to note because it is often impossible to disentangle the two once they have become intertwined. As Fontana and Frey write: "[A]s field-workers we need to exercise common sense and moral responsibility, and, we would like to add, to our subjects first, to the study next, and to ourselves last."[84]

The methodology of semi-structured interviewing has its own set of concerns. Fontana and Frey outline these areas in seven points. The first of these points requires the researcher to access the setting.[85] As an employee of Southern Progress Corporation, I worked daily on the same campus on which the *Southern Living* staff is housed, so I had easy email and telephone access for arranging the interviews, and the actual interview was as simple as walking to the interviewee's office. The second step is understanding the language and culture of the respondents. Language in this sense does not mean simply possessing a proficient vocabulary. It also includes the nuance of language that is shaped by cultural expectations and norms.[86] *Southern Living* caters to an audience of upper-middle-class readers in the southeastern United States. I grew up in just such a home in

[82] Ibid., 372.
[83] John J. Pauly, *A Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research in Mass Communication*, Journalism Monographs, (1991), 11.
[84] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "Interviewing: The Art of Science," 373.
[85] Ibid., 366.
[86] Ibid.

Jackson, Mississippi, that even subscribed to the magazine. A native Southerner, I can understand not only the denotations of language and culture but their connotations as well.

Three executive editors and three department editors of the magazine, whose editorial jurisdiction covers all major sections of the magazine (Travel, Gardens, Homes, and Food), were interviewed. These interviews investigate the subjects' regional identification, personal definition of the term "Southern," goals for the magazine, and where they think their influences come from.

Sample questions for the interviews included but were not limited to the following examples:

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Do you consider yourself a Southerner?
3. How do you apply this definition to your work at *Southern Living*?
4. Do you strive to be particularly Southern in your approach to the editorial content of the magazine?
5. What do you perceive to be the position of *Southern Living* within the magazine industry nationwide?
6. Would you like for that role to change? If so, how?
7. Where did you work prior to *Southern Living*?
8. How does the approach of that publication differ from *Southern Living* in terms of regional influence?
9. What made you decide to come to *Southern Living*?

10. How do you contribute to the editorial content of *Southern Living*?

11. What are some recent story ideas that you proposed for the magazine?

12. How did you come up with those ideas?

The interviewees were contacted via both email and telephone to arrange for the interviews, which took place in their respective offices. At the outset of each interview, the editor in question was given a sheet of paper outlining the purpose of the interview and its role within the thesis (see Appendix B). Both the researcher's contact information and contact information for the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board were included on the paper, and participants gave their oral consent to those terms. I both took notes on and recorded each interview. A technical problem caused one interview, that of the Livings Editor, to only be recorded for the first minute and twenty seconds. The remainder of the interview was recorded as silence. For that interview, notes were the principle source of information, but for the others, a combination of notes and recordings were used.

The interviews all covered the basic topics of how the editor defines the term Southern, how that definition applies to the magazine, how the editor's own Southerness relates to his or her work, and whether the magazine takes a leadership role in defining the South or simply reflects the South that its readers define.

FINDINGS

The research is divided into two methodologies: content analysis of the magazine and semi-structured interviews with the editors. The findings of the content analysis are presented first, followed by the findings of the interviews.

Content Analysis of the Magazine

The editorial content of *Southern Living* is divided into four general categories: Travel, Garden, Homes, and Food. Each category has its own section of the magazine and contributes one or more features to the well each month. In addition to these sections and the feature well, the magazine also includes individual pages: the Editor's Letter, the SouthernLiving.com page, and the Southern Living At Home page. There are three other types of pages, which, for analysis purposes, I have designated "Inspirations," "Directory" and "Southword." Inspirations is a series of pages at the front of the book that provide a visually focused introduction to the magazine. Directories include regular advertising sections such as Travel Information; Travel Directory; Market; School, College, Camp; and Classified. Southword was the name given to the pages "Southerners," "Outdoors South," "Books About the South," and "Southern Journal" by the magazine itself at the beginning of the period of study, though that specific title was done away with during the magazine's redesign. To facilitate continuity of terminology, I have continued referring to those pages under the name "Southword." Unlike the four major sections of Travel, Gardens, Homes, and Food, Southword is not concentrated in a single place in the magazine, but rather, each page stands alone within another section of

the magazine. “Southern Journal” always appears on the last editorial page of the magazine.

All of the sections were analyzed, and four principle elements of analysis were considered. These include (1) personal reference, (2) people in photography, (3) Southern location, and (4) use of the word “South.” A few sections proved to be of little interest when considering these elements. These sections were At Home, SouthernLiving.com, Directories, and Inspirations. A brief look at each of these sections is included, and the remaining sections are compared by elements of analysis, and by combination of elements. Then, a comparison of those elements from 2005 to 2006 is included.

Editor’s Letter

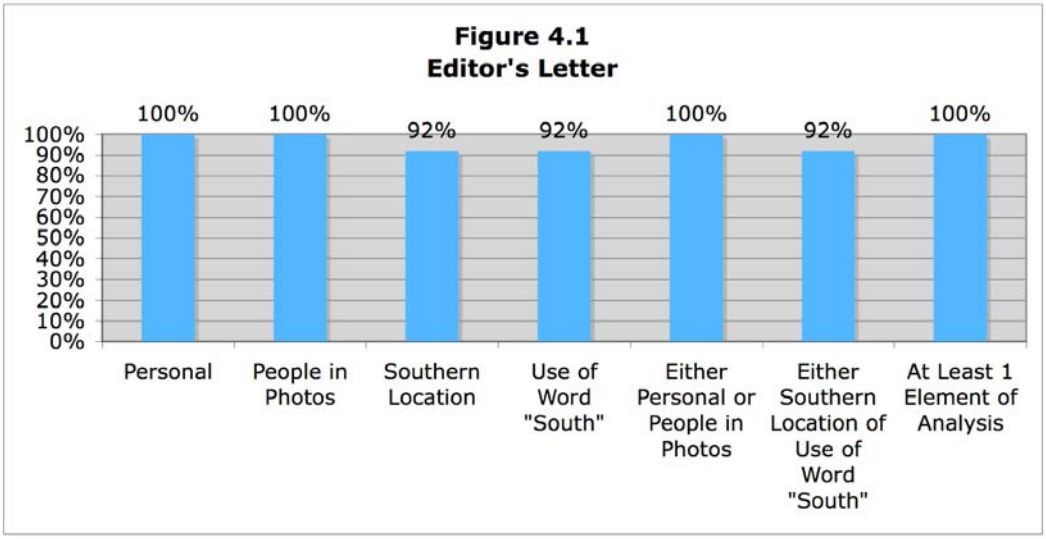
The Editor’s Letter is the first editorial page in the magazine. Formerly called “Life At,” the page name changed to “The Heart of Southern Life” in January 2006, when the magazine added the tag “The heart of Southern life” to the cover of the magazine. The page serves the typical purpose of introducing the reader to the highlights of the current issue, but it is also a place for updating the reader on changes in the magazine and its staff and, occasionally, discussing the nature of Southerness. At the beginning of the period examined, the page also included a sidebar column “In This Issue,” but that column was replaced by a column entitled “At Your Service” in January 2006, when the page’s name changed. “In This Issue” was a closer look at a few articles in the magazine, with a related photograph or two. “At Your Service” is a listing of *Southern Living*’s online and telephone services, such as subscriptions, calendar listings,

house plans, or *Southern Living* books, as well as a call for reader recipes. This information had previously been listed next to the masthead.

All 25 (100 percent) of the Editor's Letters are personal in nature. There are people, often staff members, in the photography that accompanies 24 (96 percent) of the letters. The exception is the January 2006 letter, which features sculptures honoring former *Southern Living* editors that are located in the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. This particular letter is actually a brief history of the editors and publishers of *Southern Living*.

Specific Southern locations are mentioned in 22 (88 percent) of the letters. The exceptions are January 2005, which focuses more on the staff members' contributions than on the locations of the South, the December 2005 letter, which functions as a Christmas card with a photograph of the entire magazine staff and a pitch for magazine subscriptions as gifts. The final issue in which no mention of a specific Southern location appears is October 2006, which is similar to the January 2005 letter in that it focuses on the season and staff member's contributions instead of on the location of a given story. Some variation of the word "South" appears in all but two letters. All of the letters from 2006 contain the word, as the headline of the page always reads "The Heart of Southern Life." The two exceptions, therefore, are in 2005, in January, which focused on the Healthy Living section, and in December, which is simply a Christmas card from the staff. Either personal reference or people in photography appears in 25 (100 percent) of the letters, and reference to a specific Southern location or to the word “South” appears in 23 (92 percent) of the articles. At least one of these four elements (Southern location,

people in photography, use of the word “South,” or specific Southern location) occurs in 25 (100 percent) of the articles. (See Figure 4.1)



The Editor’s Letter often offers insight into the editorial mission and history of the magazine. In the mid-April 2005 issue, the editor writes, "In this issue, our staff makes a strong case that food is a primary characteristic of the South."[87] Indeed, the bonus issue, while keeping to the standard format of sections, departments, and well, devotes its entire Feature Well to the food of the various subregions of the South and includes many excellent discussions of what it means to be Southern, particularly as it relates to food. In the December 2006 issue, in which the editor closes out the magazine's 40th anniversary year, he recounts the original editorial mission of the magazine: "The first editor, Dr. O.B. Copeland, helped birth a magazine that was, at the time, based on a concept polar opposite to contemporary popular thoughts about the South. His magazine

[87] John Floyd, Life At, *Southern Living*, mid-April 2005, 8.

would write about the good things happening across the region."[88] The editor writes that his goal is the same: "I want the pages of *Southern Living* to showcase all the wonderful things our region and its people have to offer."[89] In another discussion of the magazine's history, the August 2006 issue features an idea house that is sponsored jointly by *Southern Living* and *Progressive Farmer*. To explain the connection, as well as some of the evolution of Southern culture and tastes, the editor writes: "Forty years ago when *Southern Living* started as an outgrowth of the living section in *The Progressive Farmer*, farming was the main livelihood of the South. Today, a growing number of city-based Southerners want to savor a taste of farm life." [90]

The magazine also focuses on reader feedback, often soliciting responses, as the Editor's Letter does in the mid-April 2005 issue when it asks for readers' suggestions of places to add to the "205 Favorite Spots" travel article and solicits entries for the magazine's annual cook-off. In the January 2006 letter, when the magazine added the tag "The Heart of Southern Life" to both the cover and the Editor's Letter, the editor also discussed the importance of the Healthy Living special section to the magazine, ranking it alongside the regular sections as a "core area, along with homes, travel, food and garden."[91]

The magazine even details changes in its food staff in the May 2006 issue, which also describes the balance in convenience and tradition that the magazine tries to strike in its Food Section. The editor writes:

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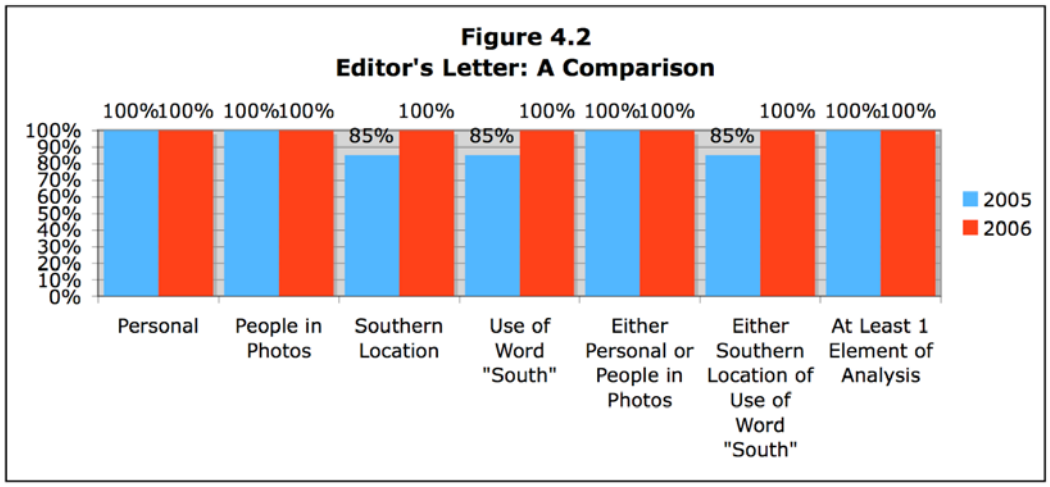
[88] John Floyd, The Heart of Southern Life, *Southern Living*, December 2006, 10.
[89] Ibid.
[90] John Floyd, The Heart of Southern Life, *Southern Living*, August 2006, 6.
[91] John Floyd, The Heart of Southern Life, *Southern Living*, January 2006, 8.

> "Today, we include convenience foods in many of our recipes to help you cook easier. On the other side of the fork, our 'Taste of the South' column shows you how to prepare the traditional recipes of the South. And for those of us who need to lose a few pounds, we provide 'Healthy & Light' recipes that taste as good as anything in our magazine."[92]

The letters also focus on the seasons of the South, keeping in sync with the warmer weather of the region and acknowledging the early beginning of spring in the February 2005 issue. Also up for discussion is the widely varying geography of the South, as in the April 2005 issue which ranges from a "lush city garden in Atlanta" to the northwest Florida home where "the porches catch the breezes coming off the Gulf" to the "magical starry nights, huge open plains, and dramatic sunsets" of West Texas, a subregion of dubious Southerness as the editor even refers to it as "a part of the South that many think of as the Old West."[93]

In comparing the Editor's Letter in 2005 (pre-redesign) to the Editor's Letter in 2006 (post-redesign), a page that already ranked extremely highly in all the areas of analysis overall actually ranked slightly higher in 2006 than it did in 2005 (see Figure 4.2). The elements of Southern location and use of the word "South" were the only elements in which the Editor's Letter scored less than 100 percent in 2005, a state that was changed in 2006, when the editor scored 100 percent in every category. (See Figure 4.2.)

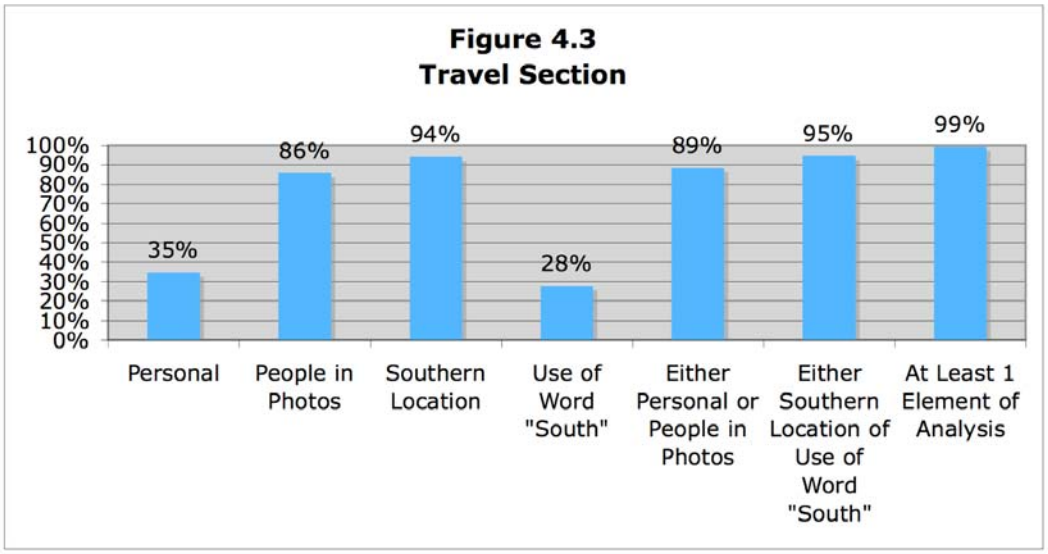
[92] John Floyd, The Heart of Southern Life, *Southern Living*, May 2006, 8.
[93] John Floyd, Life At, *Southern Living*, April 2005, 10.



Travel

Travel is the first major section of the magazine. It averages 18 pages and 12.2 stories. Like each section, Travel opens with a longer lead story, which is followed by shorter stories within the section. The length of Travel stories ranges from one to 11 pages. There are five outliers, two of which are five pages in length, one that was six pages, one that was seven pages, and one that was 11 pages. Excluding the five outlier stories, the average length for a Travel section story is 1.4 pages. The overall average length of stories is 1.5 pages. The number of Travel pages in each issue ranges from 10 to 31. The number of Travel stories in each issue ranges from 6 to 21. There are 306 total stories with 449 pages of Travel stories in the issues analyzed. There are 159 stories in 2005 and 147 in 2006. There are 106 (34.6 percent) Travel stories that can be considered personal. The remaining 200 (65.4 percent) are not. People appear in the photography of 263 (85.9 percent) stories. The remaining 43 (14.1 percent) stories do not include people. Of the 306 total stories, only 35 (11.4 percent) are neither personal nor contain photographs of people. The remaining 271 (88.6 percent) have one or the other attributes.

A Southern location is named in 288 (94.8 percent) stories while 18 (5.2 percent) stories do not specify a Southern location. Some version of the word "South" appears in 85 (27.8 percent) stories, but it does not appear in the remaining 221 (72.2 percent) stories. Either a Southern location or the word “South” appears in 290 (94.8 percent) of the stories. At least one of these four elements appears in 304 (99.3 percent) of the articles. (See Figure 4.3.)



Regular pages within the Travel section include “Close to Home,” “Weekend,” “Travel Tips,” “Food Finds,” and “Travel South.” “Close to Home” looks at a single topic in a variety of locations. These topics have included farmers’ markets in Florida, Virginia, Missouri, and Oklahoma (July 2005) and spas in North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Florida (January 2006). After the topic has been introduced in a specific location, several similar opportunities are listed individually by state. “Weekend” is usually a longer article that picks a single city and offers an itinerary for enjoying the location in the course of a weekend. It includes hotel, restaurant, shopping, and

sightseeing options. “Travel Tips” offers travel advice on a different topic, such as traveling with pets or what to wear while traveling. “Food Finds” is a review of several restaurants in a single location. The focus is on local flavor and favorites. “Travel South” is a listing of events by state, similar to calendars of events in many newspapers.

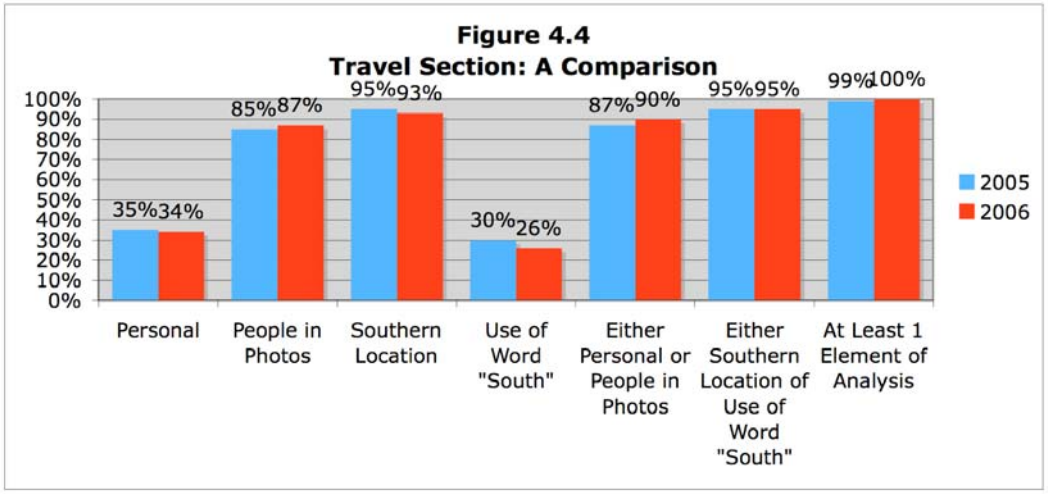
In addition to these regular pages, the Travel section includes stories on restaurants, tourism sites, local shops, and events throughout the South.

The Travel section also mentions ideas about the nature of Southerness. One particular quote appears in the April 2006 issue in the article “40 Things Every Southerner Ought to Do!” It states: “In honor of the 40th anniversary of *Southern Living*, our editors got together to ponder what makes a person Southern today. It is not, we decided, simply being born and raised here. Specific experiences and certain traits mark a genuine Southerner.”[94] By this definition, Southerness is defined by actions. The article then proceeds to list 40 things that a quintessential Southerner would do and places he or she should visit. Examples include picnicking in the Grove at Ole Miss before a football game and speaking like a true Southerner with a vocabulary including “y’all,” “fixin,’” “reckon,” and “shug.”[95] For the non-Southerner, “shug” is short for “sugar,” a term of endearment.

When comparing the Travel section in 2005 (pre-redesign) to the Travel section in 2006 (during the redesign), it maintained consistently high scores in each element of analysis, declining slightly in some areas, such as having a personal character, having a Southern location, or using some form of the word “South,” but these declines were

[94] “40 Things Every Southerner Ought to Do!” *Southern Living*. April 2006, 14.
[95] Ibid., 25

minor, and the overall distribution of the elements analyzed in this study remained substantially unchanged from year to year. (See Figure 4.4.)

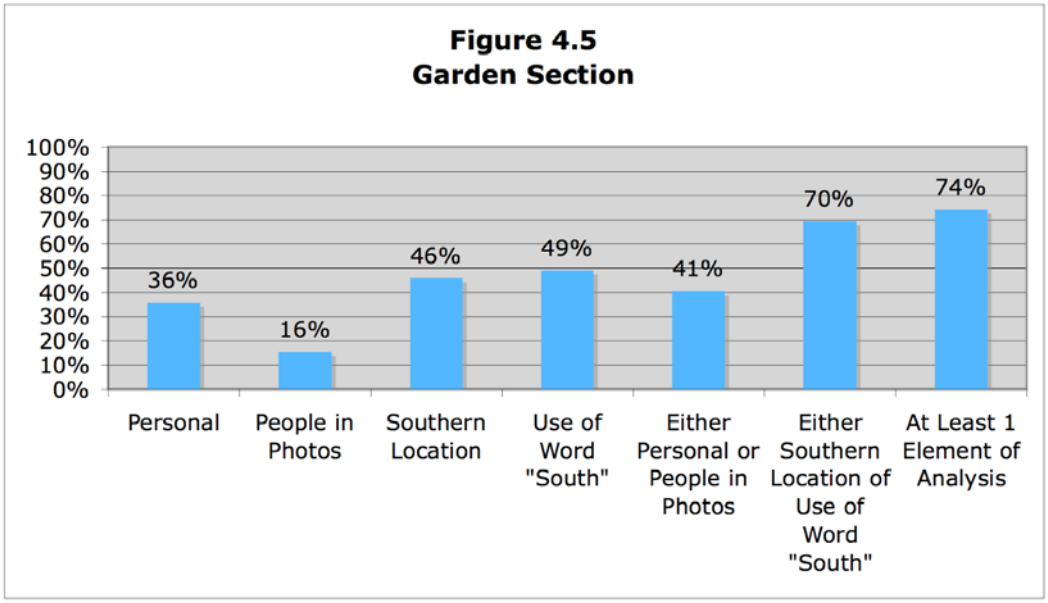


Garden

The Garden section is the second major section of the magazine and follows the Travel Directories that separate it from the Travel section. The Gardens section averages 10.8 pages and 7.5 stories. It opens with a longer lead story, which is usually followed by shorter stories within the section. The average number of pages in a Garden story is 1.4. Regular pages within the Garden section include “Garden Checklist”/“Around Your Garden” and “Garden Letters.” “Garden Checklist,” which was known as “Around Your Garden” until the April 2006 issue, is a series of blurbs on tasks that should be taken care of in the garden during the month that the issue covers. This page also includes a color-coded map of the South that divides it into “plant zones” that are referenced throughout the magazine for variations in climate throughout the South. “Garden Letters” is a forum for readers’ gardening questions to be answered by the magazine. In addition to these

regular pages, the Garden section includes stories on various plants, gardening techniques, and individual gardens.

The content analysis of the Garden section shows that there are 187 total garden department stories, 116 in 2005 and 71 in 2006. There are 271 total pages of Garden department stories, with an average of 1.4 pages per article. The articles range from one to four pages in length. Of the stories, 120 (64.2 percent) are not personal, and 67 (35.8 percent) are personal. People appeared in the photography accompanying 158 (84.5 percent) articles, and there are 29 (15.5 percent) articles without people in the photographs. However, 111 (59.4 percent) articles are neither personal nor contain photographs of people, while 76 (40.6 percent) articles are either personal or contain photographs of people. A specific Southern location is named in 101 (54 percent) articles, but 86 (46 percent) do not have a specific Southern location. Some variation of the word "South" is used in 95 (50.8 percent) articles, with nearly as many, 92 (49 percent), omitting the word. However, 130 (69.5 percent) of the articles include either a Southern location or a reference to the word "South," while only 57 (30.5 percent) articles do not. At least one of these four variables is present in 139 (74.3 percent) of the articles. (See Figure 4.5.)



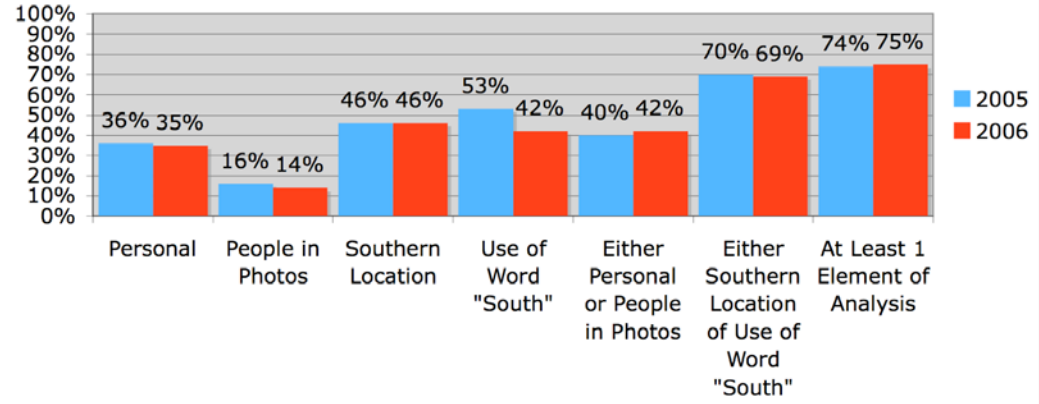
The Garden section comments on the nature of Southerness in “Huge Blooming Tree” in Mid-April 2005. Rebecca Bull Reed writes: "We Southerners are proud people. Few things bring us more joy than talking about home, barbecue, family, or football—especially if a contest is involved. Southerners also like things big—family reunions, food, and one more for your list: big trees."[96] The magazine had previously run an article on a huge dogwood tree. A reader responded with a photo of a larger one, so they ran a new article on it and wrote of the reader: "Being a polite Southerner, she didn't boast, though she could have."[97] The article encourages reader response with a request for other entries for record-breaking dogwoods.

The number of pages devoted to the Garden Section was certainly less in 2006 when it consisted of 105 pages than it was in 2005 when it consisted of 166 pages (155, if the extra mid-April issue is omitted). The composition of those pages according to the

[96] Rebecca Bull Reed, “Huge Blooming Tree,” *Southern Living*, 54.
[97] Ibid.

main elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word “South”) is relatively unchanged in three out of four categories. The principle decline is in the use of some variation of the word “South.” This attribute appeared in 53 percent of articles in 2005 but only in 42 percent in 2006. (See Figure 4.6.)

Figure 4.6
Garden Section: A Comparison

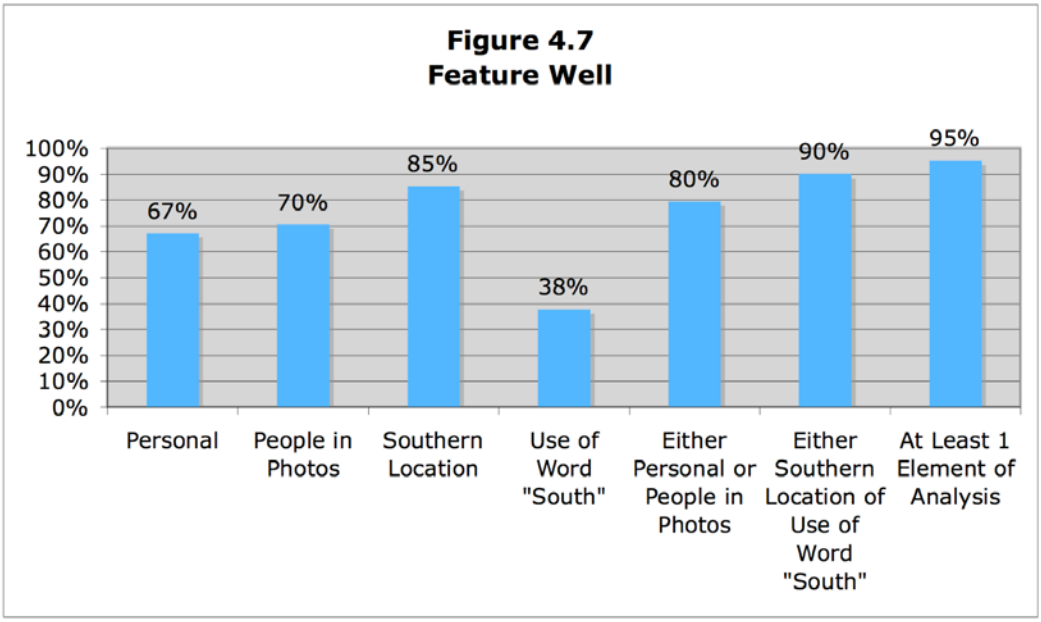


Feature Well

The Feature Well falls in the center of the magazine and averages 16.3 pages and 4.9 stories per issue. Well-story lengths vary between one and eight pages, with an average of 3.3 pages. Each section (Travel, Garden, Homes, and Food) is represented in the Feature Well, and this portion of the magazine is also a place where stories that combine sections can be published. Such stories include “To Market, To Market” in the April 2005 issue, which combined Food and Travel sections in a story about an old-fashioned Shreveport grocery store and the recipes it serves and “Where Friendship

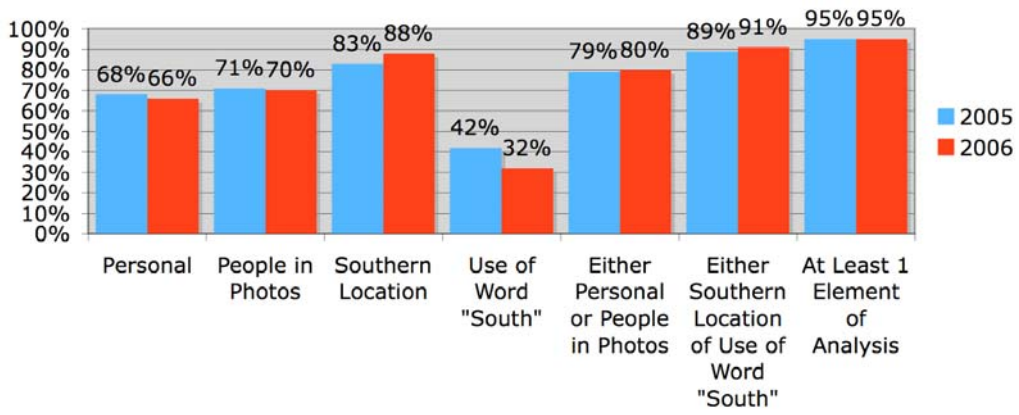
Blooms” in the March 2005 issue, which combined the Home and Garden sections in a story about moving a cottage and designing its garden.

The content analysis of the feature well shows that there are 122 total feature stories, 66 in 2005 and 56 in 2006. There are 407 total pages of feature stories. Of these, 40 (32.8 percent) stories are not personal, and 82 (67.2 percent) are personal. People appear in the photography accompanying 86 (70.5 percent) articles, and there are 36 (29.5 percent) articles without people in the photographs. However, 97 (79.5 percent) stories are either personal or have people in photographs whereas only 25 (20.5 percent) are neither personal nor have people in the photographs. A specific Southern location is named in 104 (85.2 percent) articles, but 18 (14.8 percent) do not have a specific Southern location. Some variation of the word “South” is used in 47 (38.5 percent) articles, while 75 (61.5 percent) stories do not mention the word. Only 12 (9.8 percent) stories mention neither a specific Southern location nor the word "South." The remaining 110 (90.2 percent) stories mention at least one or the other. At least one of these four elements is included in 116 (95 percent) of the articles. (See Figure 4.7.)



The number of pages devoted to the Feature Well was certainly less in 2006 when it consisted of 187 pages than it was in 2005 when it consisted of 220 pages (205, if the extra mid-April issue is omitted). The composition of those pages according to the main elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word “South”) is relatively unchanged in the personal reference categories. An increase (from 83 percent to 88 percent) is Southern location is paired with a decrease (from 42 percent to 32 percent) in the use of some variation of the word “South.” (See Figure 4.8.)

Figure 4.8
Feature Well: A Comparison

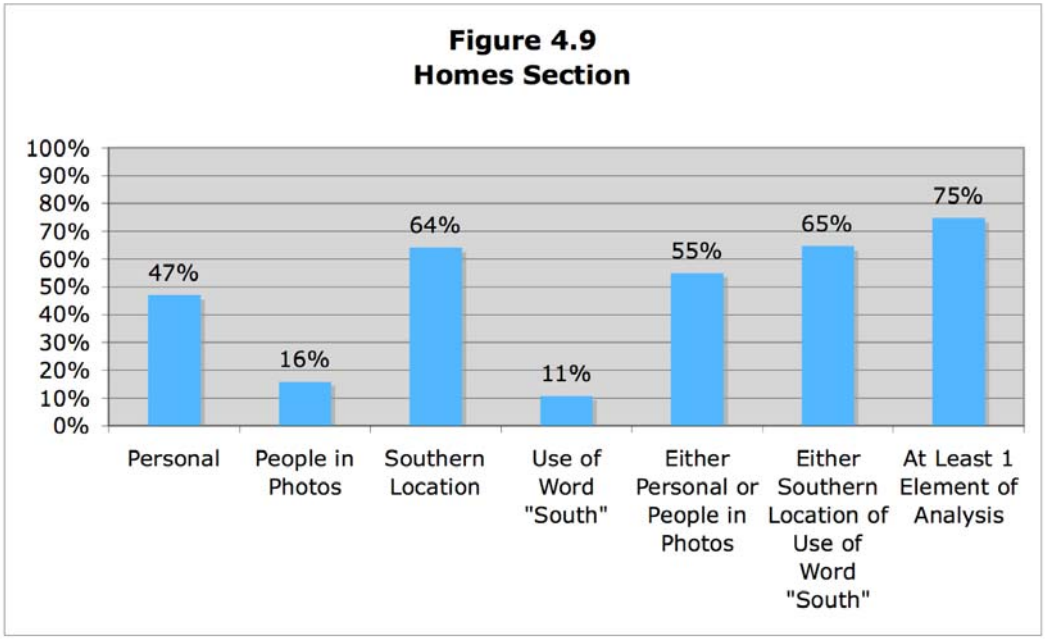


Homes

The Homes section follows the Feature Well. It averages 11.6 pages and 8.6 stories. It opens with a longer lead story, which is followed by shorter stories within the section. Regular pages within the Homes section include “House Plan,” “Home Tips,” and “Decorating Step-by-Step.” “House Plan” is a single page that includes a drawing of the house, a description, a sketch of the floor plan, information about ordering the plan, information on the architect, and ideas for possible alterations. “Home Tips” is a page that offers how-to information on a topic related to home maintenance, such as spring cleaning (April 2005) or chandeliers and sconces (April 2006). “Decorating Step-by-Step” takes a decorating project and breaks it down into a set of instructions, complete with materials needed. Projects have included “Fun Twist on Toile” (February 2005) and creative photo displays (July 2006).

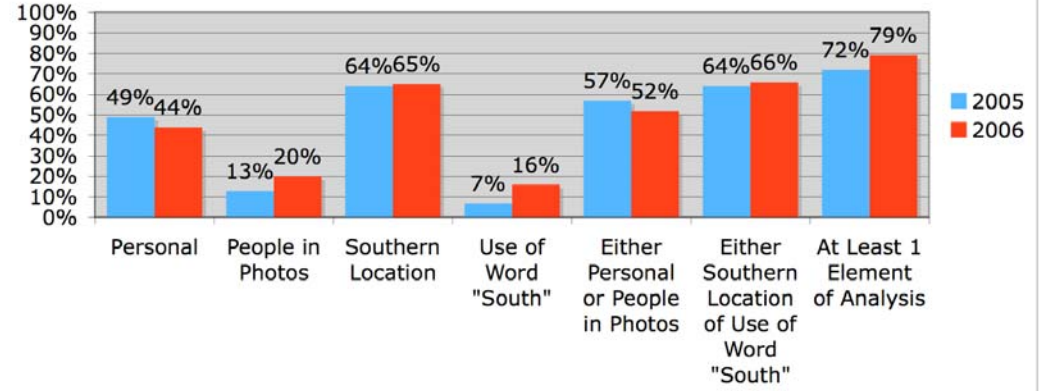
The content analysis shows that there are 215 total Homes department stories, 129 in 2005 and 86 in 2006. Overall, there are 290 total pages, with an average of 1.3 pages

per story. The stories range from one to four pages in length. Of the articles, 101 (47.0 percent) are personal in some way, and 114 (53.0 percent) are not personal. There are people in the photography of 34 (15.8 percent) articles, and 181 (84.2 percent) articles with no people in the photography. Additionally, 118 (54.9 percent) stories are either personal or have people in photographs, and 97 (45.1 percent) are neither personal nor have people in the photographs. A specific Southern location is mentioned in 138 (64.7 percent) articles, and no Southern location is mentioned in 77 (35.3 percent). Some variation of the word “South” appears in only 23 (10.7 percent) articles, while 192 (89.3 percent) articles do not use the word. Only 76 (35.3) stories neither mention a specific Southern location or the word "South." The remaining 139 (64.7 percent) stories mention at least one or the other. One or more of these four elements appears in 161 (74.9 percent) articles. (See Figure 4.9.)



The number of pages devoted to the Homes section was less in 2006 when it consisted of 121 pages than it was in 2005 when it consisted of 169 pages (158, if the extra mid-April issue is omitted). The composition of those pages according to the main elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word "South") show more variation than the sections previously discussed. Personal reference declined slightly from 49 percent to 44 percent, but the incidence of people in photography rose from 13 percent to 20 percent, and use of some variation of the word "South" increased from 7 percent to 16 percent. (See Figure 4.10.)

Figure 4.10
Homes Sections: A Comparison



Food

Food is the final major section of the magazine and follows the Homes section. It opens with a longer lead story, which is followed by shorter stories within the section. Regular pages within the Food section include "Top-Rated Menu," "Quick & Easy," "What's for Supper?," "Taste of the South," "From Our Kitchen," and "Healthy & Light." "Top-Rated Menu" offers readers recipes for a complete meal. "Quick & Easy"

focuses on quick-fix foods for busy weekday nights. “What’s for Supper?” is a dinner plan. “Taste of the South” is the portion of the magazine that pays homage to iconic Southern food, such as cheese grits, (January 2006), white barbeque sauce (August 2005), or hush puppies (April 2005). “From Our Kitchen” is a roundup of shorter food stories and cooking tips, without recipes. “Healthy & Light” is a page devoted to recipes that are lower in calories and focus on healthy eating. It’s the only page that gives nutritional analysis of each recipe.

A notable quote from the Food section offers a definition of Southerness based in food. Donna Florio in “A Southern Sampler” from the mid-April 2005 issue writes:

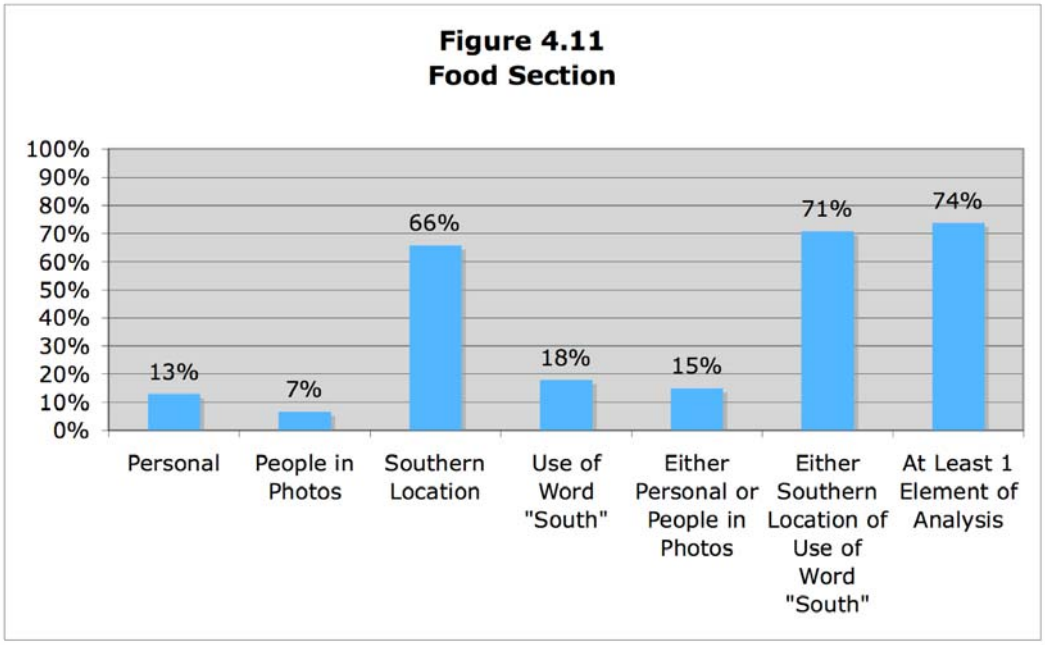
> “Food in the Deep South is comfort, heritage, and hospitality, with home-style dishes favored by all. You'd be hard-pressed to find a meat-and-three restaurant that didn't serve macaroni and cheese, greens, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, squash casserole, cornbread, fried chicken, pork chops, and potato salad. This food is the soul of the South, and you'll find it in every state in the region. Wherever you're from, there's a dish here that's sure to please."[98]

This definition focuses on traditional Southern food, home cooking and comfort.

The content analysis shows 222 total stories in the food department, 117 in 2005 and 105 in 2006. There are 345 total pages of food department stories. The stories average 1.5 pages per story and range in length from one to six pages. Only 30 (13.5 percent) articles are personal in some way, while the remaining 192 (86.5 percent) articles are straight food pieces, without any personal characteristics. Only 15 (6.8 percent) articles include people in the photography while 207 (93.2 percent) of the articles have no people featured in their photography. In 189 (85.1 percent) of the

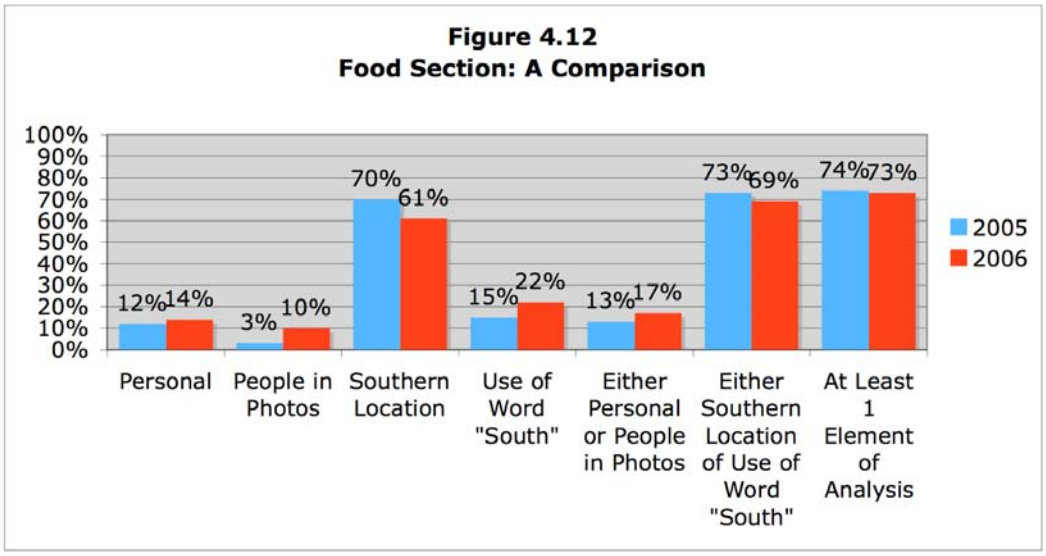
[98] Donna Florio, “A Southern Sampler,” *Southern Living*, mid-April 2005, 110.

articles, there are no people in photography, and they are not personal. In only 33 (14.9 percent) articles are there either people or personal reference. No specific Southern locations appear in 76 (34.2 percent) articles, but the remaining 146 (65.8 percent) do include Southern locations. A primary source of these locations is the hometown of readers who submit recipes. A variation of the word “South” appears in 40 (18.0 percent) articles, but 182 (82.0 percent) articles do not contain the word. In 65 (29.3 percent) of the articles there is neither a reference to the word “South” nor a specific Southern location. The remaining 157 (70.7 percent) articles, however, include either a specific Southern location or the word “South.” At least one of these four elements appears in 164 (73.9 percent) of the articles. (See Figure 4.11.)



The number of pages devoted to the Food section was less in 2006 when it consisted of 159 pages than it was in 2005 when it consisted of 186 pages (172, if the extra mid-April issue is omitted). The composition of those pages according to the main

elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word “South”) show some variation between the two years as well. In particular, the incidence of people in photography rose from 3 percent to 10 percent, the rate of inclusion of a specific Southern location declined from 70 percent to 61 percent, and use of some variation of the word “South” increased from 15 percent to 22 percent. (See Figure 4.12.)

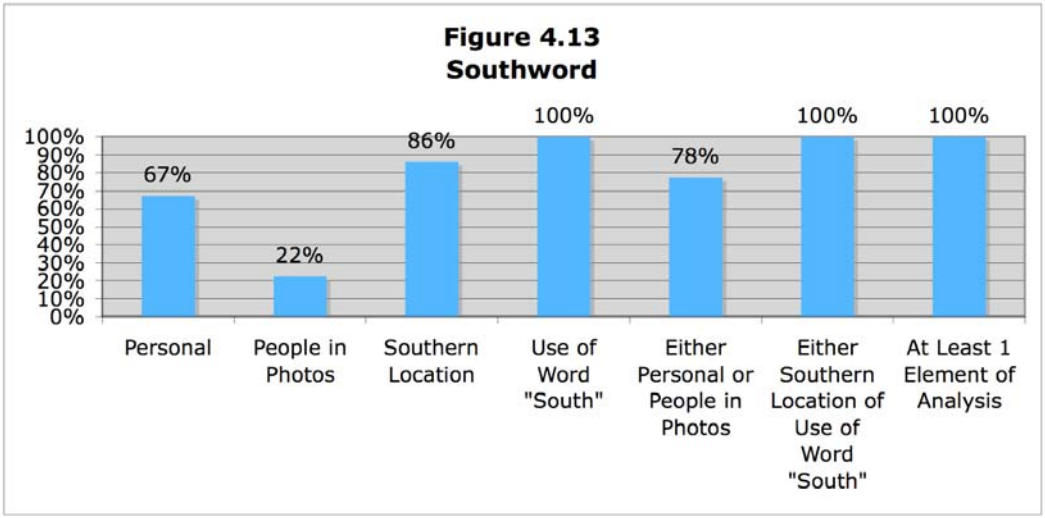


Southword

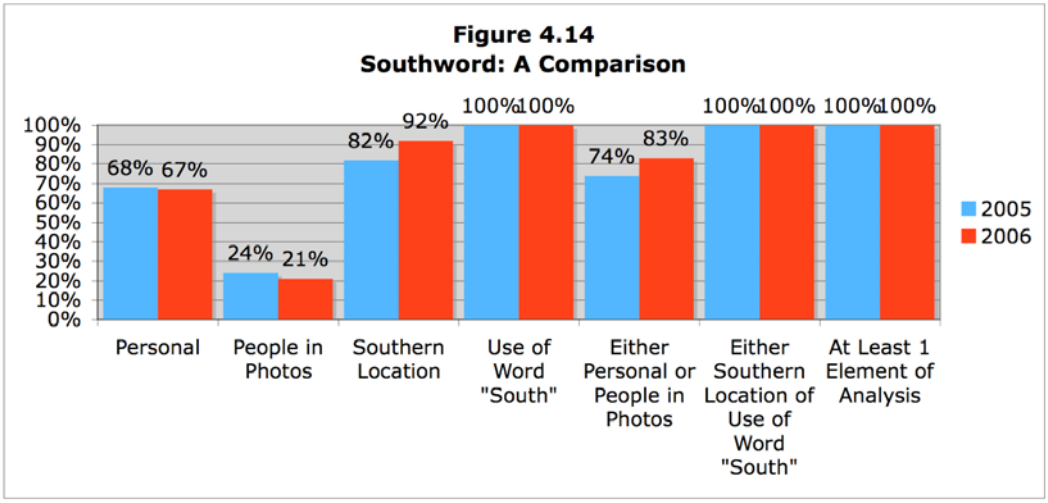
Southword is not a distinct section gathered in a central location within the magazine’s pages, as the others are. Rather, Southword refers to certain one-page stories scattered throughout the magazine. At least one Southword story appears in each issue, although the magazine stopped using the term “Southword” to describe them in the April 2006 issue. The types of stories included in Southword are “Books About the South,” a roundup of new Southern books; “Outdoors South,” on some aspect of Southern nature beyond the cultivated garden; “Southerners,” a profile of an individual; and “Southern

Journal,” a personal essay on some aspect of Southern life that appears on the final page of the magazine and is one of the few articles occasionally written by someone not on the magazine’s staff.

Content analysis of the Southword stories reveals a total of 56 stories at one page per story, resulting in 56 total pages. There are an average of 2.24 stories and pages per issue. "Books About the South" appears in 15 (60.0 percent) issues; “Outdoors South” appears in 13 (52.0 percent) issues; “Southerners” appears in 5 (20.0 percent) issues, and “Southern Journal” appears on the last page of every issue. Of the 56 stories, 19 (33.9 percent) are not personal, and 37 (66.1 percent) are personal. People appear in photography in only 11 (19.6 percent) stories, while the remaining 45 (80.4 percent) articles have no people in photography. The lack of people in photography may be explained in that most of these stories are accompanied by illustrations instead of photography. Of the stories, 13 (23.2 percent) are neither personal nor have people in the photos; the remaining 43 (76.8 percent) stories are either personal or have people in the photography. Only eight (14.3 percent) have no specific Southern location, while the remaining 48 (85.7 percent) do name a specific Southern location. Because the titles of all of these pages contain some incarnation of the word "South," all of the stories include the word. At least one of these four elements is included in 56 (100 percent) articles. (See Figure 4.13.)



The number of pages devoted to Southword was the same in 2006 (24 pages) as it was in 2005 (also 24 pages, 23 if the extra mid-April issue is omitted). This consistency in page count is interesting to note because the designation “Southword” was done away with in the redesign of 2006, although the types of stories included in Southword continued to run in the magazine. The removal of the name does not appear to have diminished the section. The composition of those pages according to the main elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word “South”) was relatively consistent. The most noticeable difference between the two years is an increase in the percentage of stories in which a specific Southern location is mentioned, from 82 percent to 92 percent. (See Figure 4.14.)



Special Sections

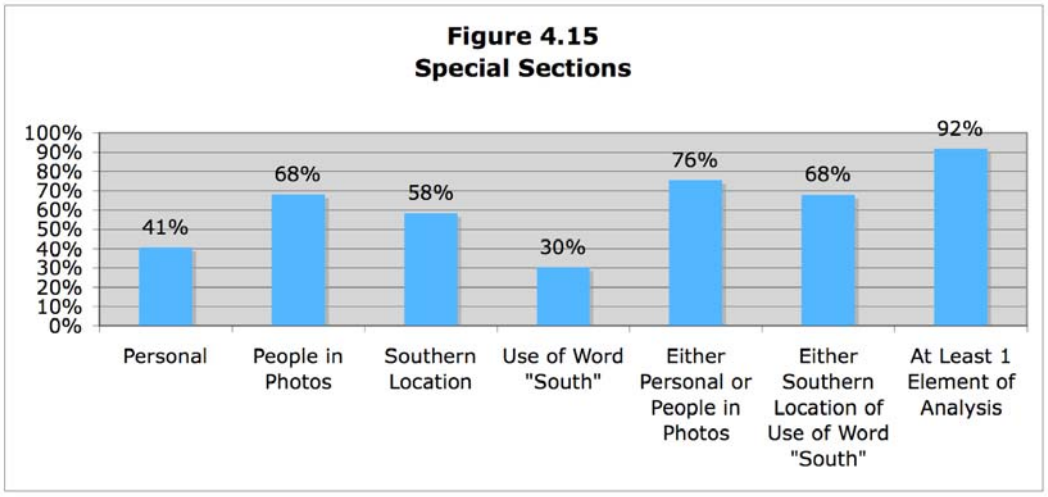
Most of the issues of *Southern Living* include at least one Special Section. These usually take one or more of the regular topics of travel, garden, home, or food and expand upon a certain theme. For example, November 2006 contained a Special Section called "Holiday Dinners," which focused on food and followed the Food section. December 2005, however, included a Special Section called "Christmas All Through the House." This section was a combination of food and decorating ideas with a Christmas theme. It was located between the Homes and Foods sections. Other Special Sections, however, do not cover the standard *Southern Living* topics. "Healthy Living" includes tips for exercise, healthy eating, health topics, and pleasurable activities. "All South" is the fall football preview, which appears in the September issue each year and showcases football teams from across the magazine's reading region.

There are no Special Sections in the April and mid-April 2005 issues, perhaps because the staff produced two full issues that month. All other issues contain one Special Section except for September 2005 and 2006, October 2005 and 2006, and April

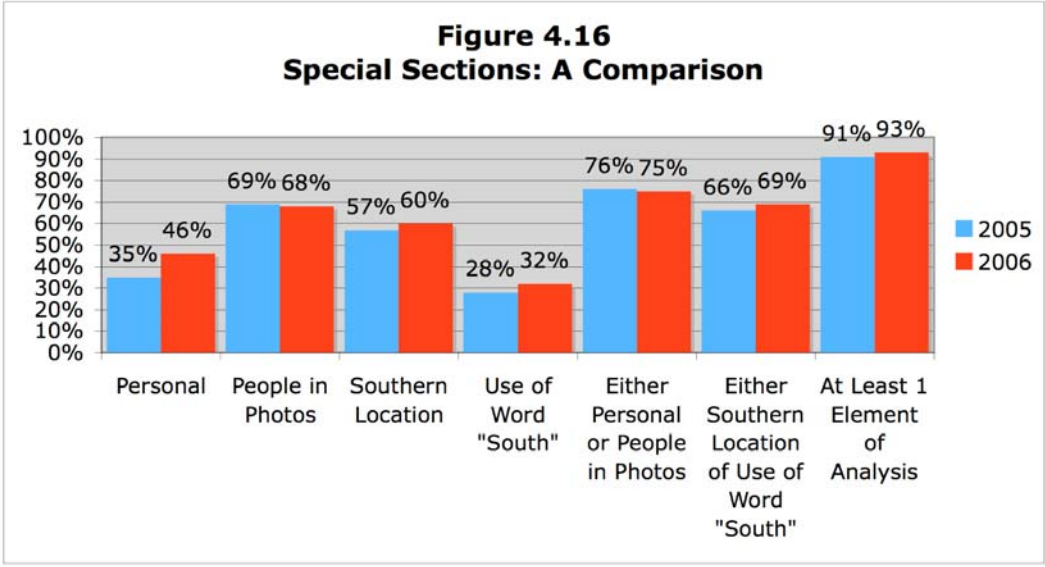
2006, all of which have two Special Sections. There are 221 total Special Section stories. There are 448 total pages of Special Section stories. The stories range in length from one to 15 pages. The average story length is two pages. Each issue that contains a Special Section averages 9.6 Special Section stories and 19.5 pages of Special Section stories. Each month features the same Special Sections each year. January features "Healthy Living." February features a kitchen-centered Special Section called "The Kitchen: Recipe for Style" in 2005 and "Living in the Kitchen" in 2006. March features "Southern Gardener." April 2006 features two Special Sections: "Healthy Living" and "Soul of the South," a look at Southern music. May features "The Southern Home." June features "Healthy Living." July features "Summer Living." August features the *Southern Living* Idea Houses, which are built as showcases in three locations around the South each year. In addition to being featured in the magazines, these houses are also open to the public. September includes two Special Sections: "All South," a football preview of Southern universities, and "Weekend Living." October also has two special sections: "Healthy Living" and "Southern Home Awards." November features "Holiday Dinners." December features "Christmas All Through the House."

Only 90 (40.7 percent) articles are personal in some way while the remaining 131 (59.3 percent) articles are not. Of the 221 articles, 151 (68.3 percent) articles include people in the photography, while 70 (31.7 percent) of the articles have no people featured in their photography. In 54 (24.4 percent) of the articles, there are no people in photography, and they are not personal. In 167 (75.6 percent) articles there are either people or personal reference. No specific Southern locations appear in 92 (41.6 percent)

articles, but the remaining 129 (58.4 percent) do include Southern locations. A variation of the word “South” appears in 67 (30.3 percent) articles, but 154 (69.7 percent) articles do not contain the word. In 71 (32 percent) of the articles there is neither a reference to the word “South” nor a specific Southern location. The remaining 150 (68 percent) articles, however, include either a specific Southern location or the word “South.” At least one of these four elements is included in 202 (91.4 percent) of the stories. (See Figure 4.15.)



The number of pages devoted to Special Sections was less in 2006 when it consisted of 225 pages than it was in 2005 when it consisted of 245 pages (the extra mid-April issue contained no Special Section). The composition of those pages according to the main elements of analysis examined here (personal character, people in photography, Southern location, and use of the word “South”) was relatively consistent. The most the biggest jump in percentage was seen in the area of personal reference, which increased from 35 percent to 46 percent. (See Figure 4.14.)



This Month at SouthernLiving.com

The magazine's Web site–related page is a single column beside the masthead that refers reader to its Web page for more information on various stories or to access the Web site's regular tools, such as its recipe archive. None of the stories are personal in nature. There are people in the photography accompanying two (8 percent) of the stories. The remaining 23 (92 percent) stories have no people in the photography. One story (4 percent) has a Southern location. The remaining 24 (96 percent) do not. Some variation of the word "South" is used in four (16 percent) of the stories. The remaining 21 (84 percent) do not include the word "South."

At Home With Ideas

This single column, located beside the advertising masthead, is actually an advertisement for Southern Living At Home products. Southern Living At Home is a home-selling organization that markets products seen in the pages of *Southern Living* magazine, and this page profiles a different product each month along with a creative tip

for how to use it. This column first appears in January 2006. None of the stories are personal, have Southern locations, have people in the photography or use any form of the word “South.”

Inspirations

Inspirations is a series of pages at the front of the magazine that pair a large, nearly full-page image with a small block of text. The pages usually relate to one of the magazine’s primary sections but rely on the dominant image to pique readers’ interest for the section. There are three to five pages of Inspirations each month, with an average of 4.25 pages per issue. Inspirations are first included in the magazine in the May 2006 issue. None of the stories are personal. Out of 34 total pages, 11 (32 percent) of the stories include people in the photographs while 23 (68 percent) stories do not. A Southern location is mentioned in six (18 percent) of the 34 articles. A form of the word “South” appears in five (15 percent) articles, but no reference is made to the word in 29 (85 percent) articles.

Directories

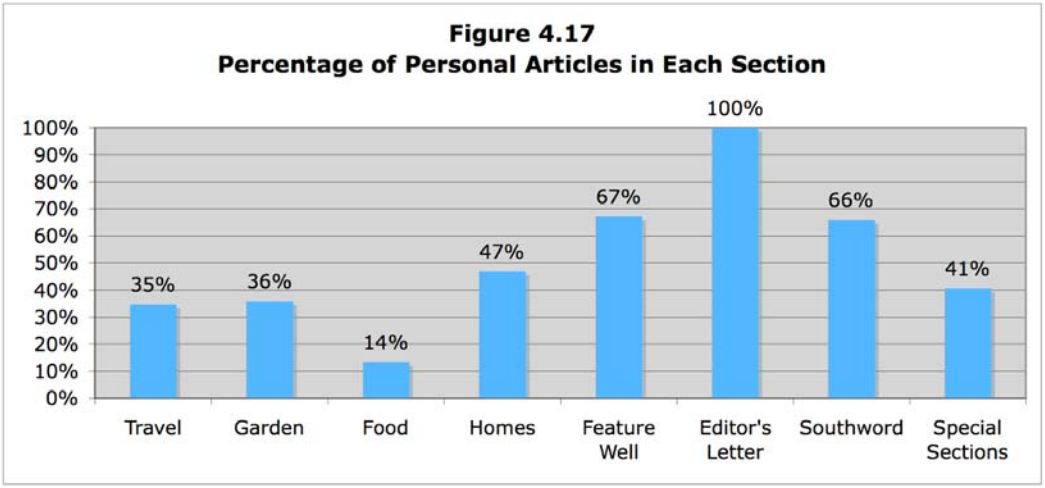
Each issue had between three and six directories. The average number of directories per issue is 4.68. The average number of directory pages per issue is 10.52. The number of pages devoted to directories in each issue ranges from 11 to 14. The directories are advertising sections grouped around a theme such as “*Southern Living* Vacations,” “Travel Information,” “Travel Directory,” “Market,” “School, College, Camp,” and “Classified.” The directories are listed in the table of contents, but their

specific content is not analyzed for the purposes of this study, as it is not generated by the editorial staff.

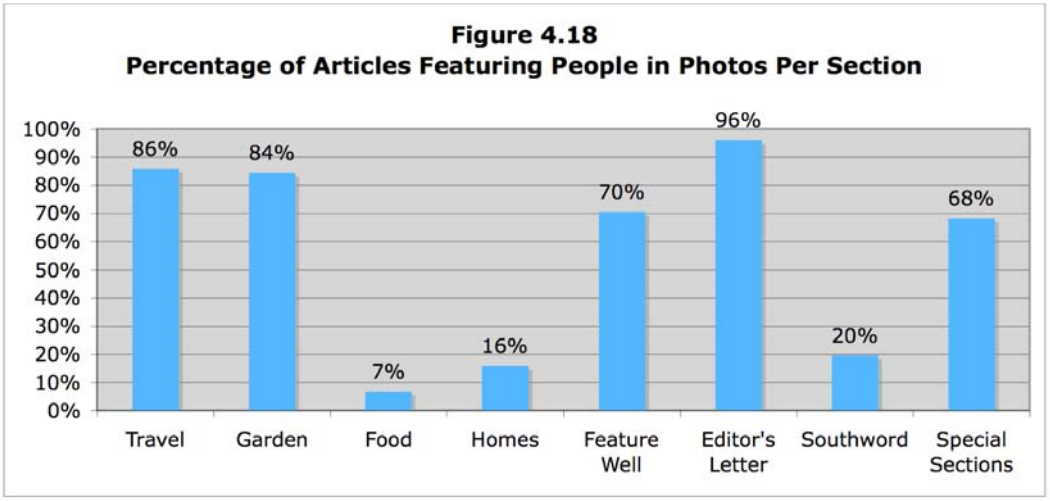
Comparison Among the Sections

By its nature as a letter, the Editor's Letter has the highest percentage of personal articles at 100 percent. The lowest is the Food Section with 13.5 percent. The Feature Well stories and Southword articles both ranked toward the higher end whereas the remaining sections all register less than half their articles as personal in nature. (See Figure 4.17.)

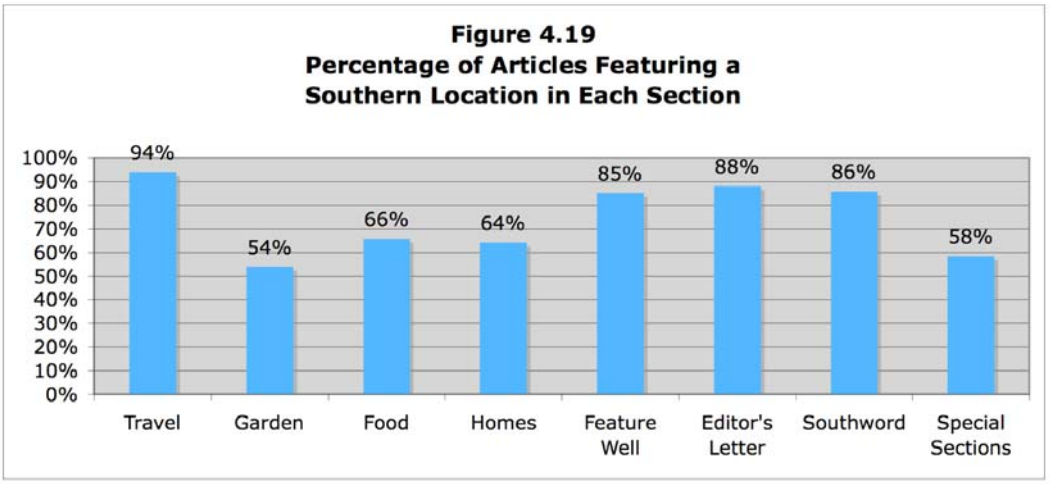
Figure 4.17
Percentage of Personal Articles in Each Section



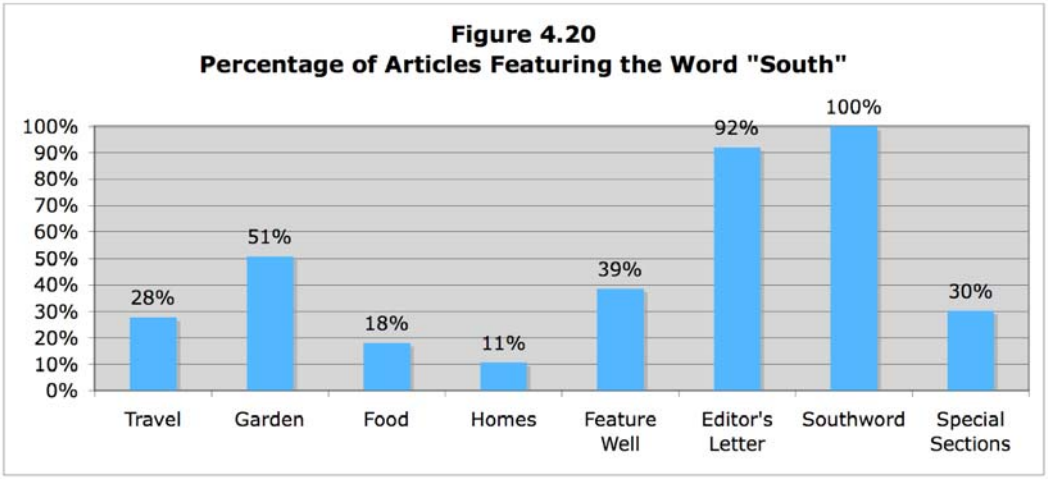
In comparing the incidence of people in photography among the sections, again, the Editor's Letter ranks highest with 96 percent of its articles featuring people in the photographs. Travel, Gardens, Feature Well, and Special Sections each rank fairly high in this category while Southword and Homes are both less than 20 percent, and Food ranks the lowest at 7 percent. (See Figure 4.18.)



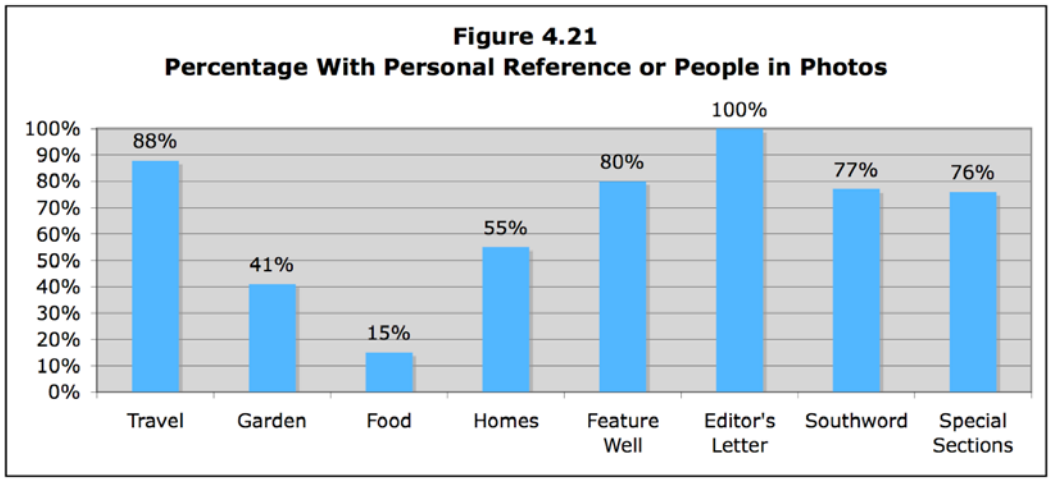
All of the sections rank fairly high in mentioning specific Southern locations. Travel is the highest with 94 percent, and Gardens comes in last with 54 percent. (See Figure 4.19.)



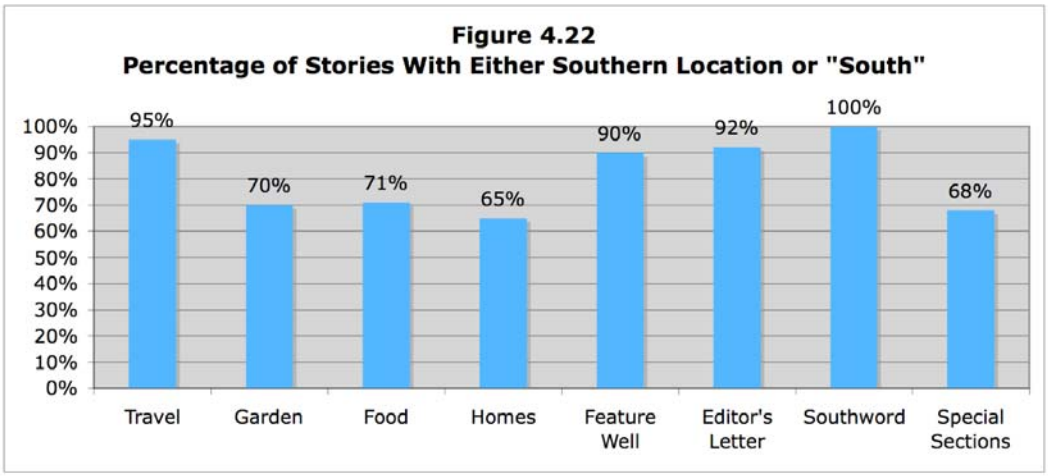
Some form of the word “South” appears in an extremely high percentage of Southword articles and Editor’s Letters (100 percent and 92 percent, respectively). The next highest section is Gardens with 51 percent, a significant drop. The remaining sections have much lower percentages with Homes coming in last at 18 percent. (See Figure 4.20)



It is also important to look at the individual elements in combination to get an overall sense of how the stories in each section are put together. The elements that give a story a personal feel are those of personal reference and people in photos. These elements can be looked at together to see what percentage of stories in each section contains at least one personal element. The Editor's Letters come in first with 100 percent, followed by Travel at 88.6 percent, feature stories at 79.5 percent, Southword at 76.8 percent, and Special Sections at 75.6 percent. The Homes section is significantly lower with 54.9 percent, followed by Gardens at 40.6 percent. The Food stories come in at the bottom with only 14.9 percent including some personal element. (See Figure 4.21.)

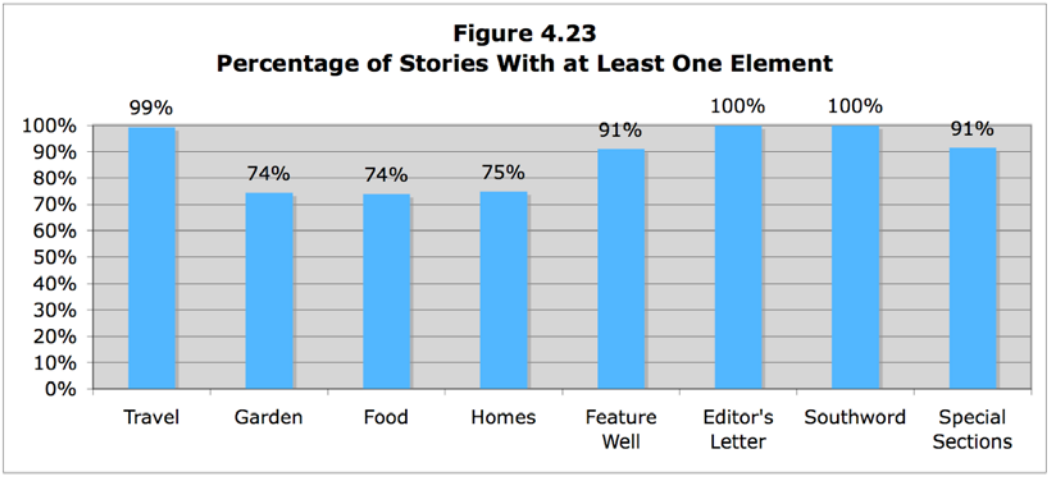


The elements that ground the stories in the physical region of the South are mention of a specific Southern location or the use of some form of the word "South." All of the sections ranked fairly high in this variable. (See Figure 4.22.)



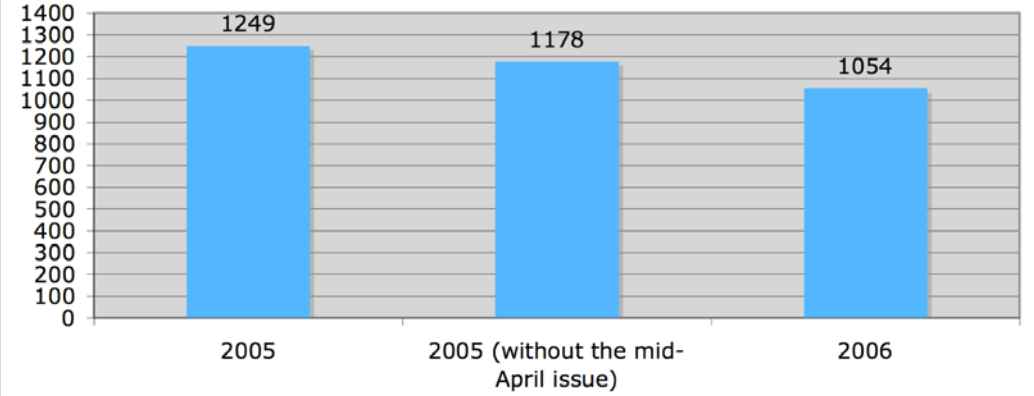
The various sections all score high marks in including at least one of the analyzed elements in a high percentage of their stories. Editor's Letter and Southword score the highest percentages with 100 percent each, with Travel a close second at 99.3 percent followed by Special Sections at 91.4 percent. The remaining sections score lower

percentages, but are still high in absolute terms, all scoring between 73 percent and 75 percent. (See Figure 4.23.)

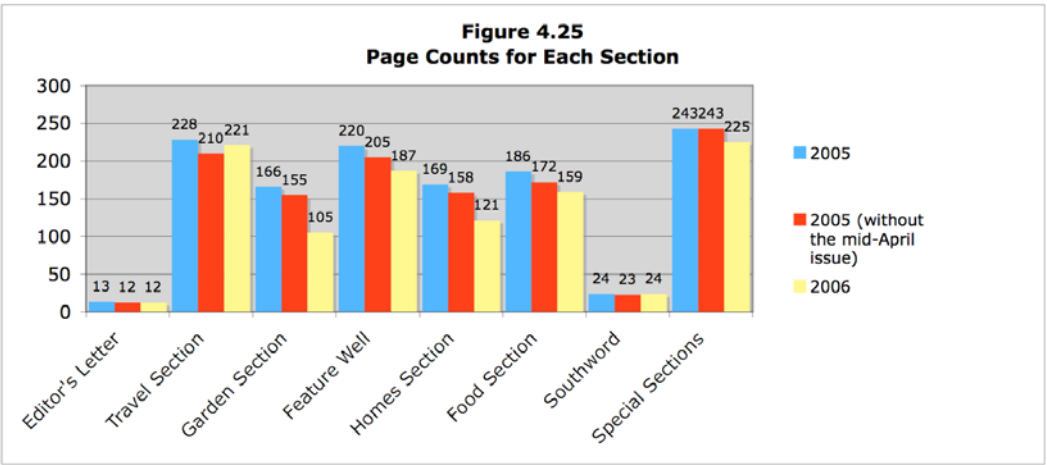


When comparing the makeup of the pre-redesign issues of 2005 to the redesigned issues of 2006, the most notable difference is the decline in overall page count. Some of this decline can be accounted for by subtracting the pages of the mid-April 2005 issue, which was in addition to the standard 12 issues per year. Even after subtracting those pages, however, the total page count is still lower in 2006 when it totals 1,054, down from 1,178 in 2005 (1,249, if the mid-April issue is included). The 2006 page count is 84 percent of the 2005 page count when the mid-April issue is included and 89 percent of the 2005 page count when the mid-April issue is excluded. (See Figure 4.24.)

Figure 4.24
Total Page Count



Declining overall page counts, however, are most likely linked to advertising, so it is necessary to look at how the remaining pages are allocated among the sections to determine if there is a shift in editorial emphasis during the magazine's 2006 redesign. In this area, two sections, the Editor's Letter and Southword maintained their 2005 page counts, this despite doing away with "Southword" as a named section in the magazine. The types of pages that had made up the former Southword (such as "Southern Journal," "Southerners," or "Outdoors South") continued with the same consistency, even though they were no longer grouped together in the table of contents as "Southword" articles. While the Travel Section did decline in total page count from all of 2005, it actually had more pages than 2005 if the mid-April issue is excluded. In all other sections, the page count declined from 2005 to 2006. (See Figure 4.25.)



The most straightforward means of comparing the relative significance of each section within the magazine is to look at the percentage of total editorial pages taken up by each section. Any change in that allocation might be an indication of a shifting editorial emphasis. In both 2005 and 2006, the Editor's Letter made up 1 percent of the magazine and Southword 2 percent, by far the smallest departments, though both were consistent from year to year. The Feature Well made up 18 percent of the magazine both years, and Food came in at 15 percent of the magazine both years. The Travel Section increased from 18 percent of the magazine in 2005 to 22 percent of the magazine in 2006. Special Sections also grew from 19 percent of the magazine in 2005 to 21 percent of the magazine in 2006. The two sections that decreased in page count were Gardens, which went from 13 percent of the magazine in 2005 to 10 percent in 2006 and Homes, which went from 14 percent in 2005 to 11 percent in 2006. (See Figures 4.26 and 4.27.) Because of these changing percentages, the magazine seems to be shifting focus away from Homes and Gardens and toward Travel and Special Sections.

Figure 4.26
Percentage of the Magazine Devoted to Each Section in 2005

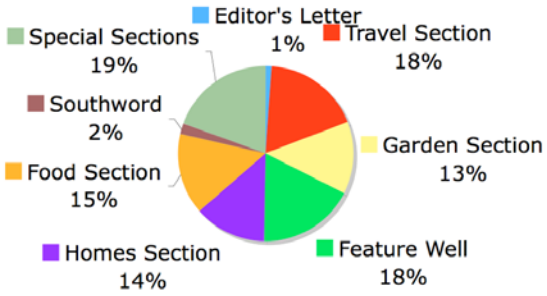
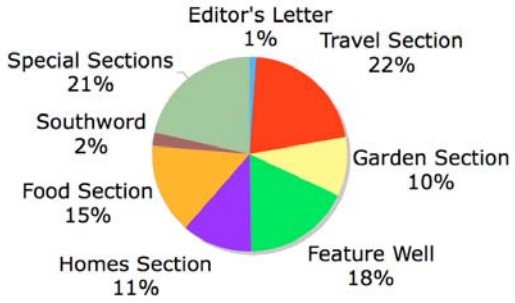
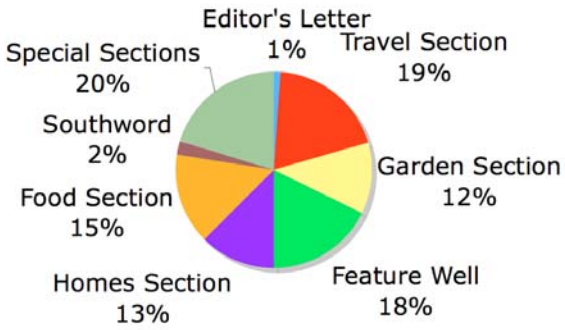


Figure 4.27
Percentage of the Magazine Devoted to Each Section in 2006



Over the entire two-year span studied, the editorial content of the magazine is allocated in largest proportion to Special Sections (20 percent), the Travel Section (19 percent), and the Feature Well (18 percent). Next greatest space is allotted to the remaining principle sections of Food (15 percent), Homes (13 percent), and Gardens (12 percent). The least editorial space is give to Southword (2 percent) and the Editor's Letter (1 percent). (See Figure 4.28.)

Figure 4.28
Percentage of the Magazine Devoted to Each Section in 2005 and 2006



Content Analysis Conclusion

The content analysis of *Southern Living* issues from 2005 and 2006 examined both the role of each section within the magazine and the emphasis each section places on certain elements of personal reference, people in photography, specific Southern location, or use of the word "South." The Travel Section, Feature Well, and Special Sections, in addition to the shorter Southword and Editor's Letter pages, scored the highest in the elements studied. Interestingly, these were also the sections that either maintain a constant percentage of editorial pages or increased their percentage from 2005 to 2006. Such a change seems to indicate an increase in attention to the elements of Southerness displayed in the magazine over the time analyzed, but this correlation does not necessarily imply causation.

Interviews

Interviews of the executive and section editors took place in their offices and ranged in length from 22 to 54 minutes. Although there was a basic outline of questions, broad leeway existed for additional discussion. Six interviews were conducted, three with the magazine's executive editors who each oversee a section or combination of sections (Travel and Livings, Food, Home and Garden) and three with section editors of the Food, Travel, and Livings sections in order to gain additional insight to those sections. The first interview, which was with the Executive Editor of Travel and Livings was the longest for two reasons: (1) It laid the groundwork for the interview process and first offered information that was repeated in less depth in later interviews and (2) because the Travel and Livings sections deal explicitly with the South as a geographic region, the editor had a great deal to say about the nature of the magazine in the region. Most interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews with section editors tended to be a bit less in-depth and rather served to offer a different perspective on a topic that had already been covered with the executive editors. It is interesting to note that the magazine's readership is 77 percent female, but four of the six editors interviewed and all of the executive editors are male. None of the interviews, however, focused on gender or its effect on reader demands and editorial response. Transcripts of the interviews are available in Appendix C.

Executive Editor, Travel and Livings

The Executive Editor for the Travel and Livings (EETL) is a native of Birmingham. His past work experience includes the city magazine *D* in Dallas, the online magazine *HotDots* at Southern Progress, and *Health* magazine, a sister Southern Progress

magazine to *Southern Living*. He considers himself a Southerner. His personal definition of the word "Southern" is something with a relaxed tone, realistic, not overly stylized, with informal language. He describes it as a conversation with neighbors over the backyard fence. In terms of the magazine's definition of "Southern," he views it as a focus on local sources and contacts developed through regular visits across the South.

"The South is changing, and we try to reflect it through race, topic, and geography," he said. In terms of the region covered by the magazine, he says they roughly follow the Mason-Dixon line, but recognize that some states on the border might not identify as Southern the same way states farther South do. In those cases, he says the magazine strives to capture the spirit of those specific places but that readers in those areas also want to feel a sense of Southerness, even if it's not all around them. He describes this as "tapping into the emotion that people might want to feel" because, despite changing culture and demographics, people still like to feel that the South is a distinct entity.

When covering locations for the Travel section, he expands the area that can be covered beyond the stated region to include areas surrounding the states on the northern border. The example he gave was covering the Brandywine Valley in Pennsylvania (not part of the *Southern Living* region) because it is only six miles from readers in Delaware (part of the *Southern Living* region).

The EETL does think that being a Southerner is beneficial for someone on the staff of *Southern Living* because it allows him to draw on personal experience and contacts developed outside of his work at the magazine. Instead of moving to a new

location and developing contacts for story ideas from scratch, he has a lifetime of Southern experiences he has enjoyed or those recommended by friends and family throughout the region that can be incorporated into story ideas for the Travel and Livings sections. With 122 on the editorial staff, 95 percent of the magazine is produced by the staff. The EETL says that relying on regular staff writers keeps a consistent focus and eliminates the disparate voices that freelancers can bring to a magazine. One technique *Southern Living* does not employ is writing in dialect. While an occasional colloquialism might be permitted, the magazine is very strict with its grammar, he says. He rejects the Southern stereotypes of "moonlight and magnolias" associated with the Old South for magazine content and focuses instead on how Southerners live today.

One difference he notes between a *Southern Living* travel story and those of a national magazine is the frequency with which they revisit places because of their confined region. Because of this frequency, a *Southern Living* travel story on a particular city will dig deeper to find something new and fresh instead of focusing on the traditional city highlights that a magazine only covering the city once would address. He also sites the magazine's cost-consciousness as a Southern trait. Even if a travel story highlights an expensive hotel, the story will acknowledge that it's a splurge.

The EETL sees the customized localization of the magazine through state-specific signatures as increasing the "Southerness" of the publication because it allows the magazine to focus on things that wouldn't be covered in other large magazines. He says that recognition and sense of familiarity the readers have with the subject matter makes the magazine feel more genuine. According to the EETL, the magazine publishes

between 17 and 21 editions of each issue, tailoring each edition to a specific subregion of the South.

The EETL divided stories in the magazine into local interest and regional interest. Local interest stories focus on some small spot within a subregion that those readers would recognize and enjoy seeing featured in the magazine's pages. These stories often only run in the states mentioned in the story. They are part of the magazine's state-by-state customization. He didn't expect the readers to notice these signatures (they have page numbers designating the state), but they are designed to develop a feeling of connection with the magazine because readers see stories on their special places. These stories will appear in the state signatures. One point to note, however, is that these stories do not necessarily just cover locations within that state but also neighboring states and locations that people in those states travel to or through regularly. For example, a story about an Alabama fruit stand might also run in Kentucky and Tennessee because those readers are likely to pass the stand while traveling down I-65 to the beach. Regional interest stories focus on major cities such as New Orleans, Atlanta, and Charleston that appeal to all readers, and these stories will have a full run in all editions of the magazine. In addition, a given story might also have versions of multiple lengths to play it up in some editions or give it a more minor role in others.

In considering whether the magazine leads the region in defining "Southerness" or gets its definition from it's readers, the EETL leans toward a reader-centered definition. According to the EETL, *Southern Living*'s editorial focus is on the reader, as manifest through its extensive reader research, the state signatures in which certain

stories that cover an individual state will appear in that state's edition only, and an insistence that all readers who contact the magazine get a response. Each of these components tailors the magazine experience to the desires of its readers and further establishes the magazine as a reflection of its readership. "We're committed to being what readers want," he said. He sited the Editor's Letter in each issue as beginning with "Dear Friend" as a small touch that's indicative of the relationship the magazine wants with its readers. "I think sometimes we try to lead and tell people about things they may not have known about, and other times it's us looking to them for what they're interested in," he says. But, he stresses that *Southern Living* strives to be the magazine its readers want it to be, that it wants the reader to feel that it is a "magazine for them and by people like them."

Executive Editor, Food

The Executive Editor for Food (EEF) considers himself a Southerner who has lived in North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi. He doesn't consider it necessary to be a Southerner to edit the Food Section of *Southern Living*, but he does find it useful for understanding the themes of Southerness. He defines Southerness as "knowing where we come from historically," namely an agrarian economy with a strong tradition of people relying on their own land for food with the familiar ingredients that make comfort food. He sees the family meal as central to the Southern understanding of food. He considers *Southern Living* unique because it is very much a reader-based magazine, so much so that he describes it as "working for a client" in that it's a service publication that relies on research and reader feedback for story planning. "We're really

looking to them to define the trends as opposed to us to define the trends, which is really what most editors of epicurean magazines do," he says.

Every story must meet the "Three S" requirement of Southern, Seasonal, and Service. He also adds his own, unofficial fourth S of Simplicity. The Food Section focuses on cooking in season. The magazine acknowledges that most of its readers live in smaller markets that don't have access to Whole Foods, so the food content has to draw on what is available at local grocery stores and farmers' markets. He also focuses on streamlined recipes that use convenience products, are budget friendly, and easier for new cooks. The reader demographic most targeted is a relatively inexperienced cook who has a notion of Southern food and feels strongly about having a family dinner.

The EEF is especially enthusiastic about the changing demographics of the South. He points to growing Hispanic and Asian populations whose younger generations identify as Southerners as an opportunity for incorporating new flavors into the traditional Southern palate. In this way, the magazine is able to combine the new with the familiar by using standard Southern foods and introducing new cooking methods or flavor profiles. The example he gives is cooking the familiar catfish with a Thai flavor profile by adding lemongrass and peppers. He considers Mexican food as part of the Southern palate because of its prevalence in Texas, which is one of the magazine's largest areas. The preferences of Southerners seem to be changing as the healthfulness of foods becomes a greater priority and Southerners move away from traditional foods, such as fried chicken, that are not healthy.

The Food Section uses as many reader recipes as possible, and the EEF says between 65 and 75 percent of recipes each month are reader-generated. The magazine is careful to maintain a balanced presentation and not focus too heavily on one region. The EEF maintains this notion of diversity of geography and subject matter within the food section, but also as counterbalanced to the magazine as a whole. He mixes urban and country, interior and exterior, day and night, East Coast and central because he wants every reader to feel as if the magazine is talking specifically to his or her region. Unlike the Travel Section, however, the Food Section does not focus as much on customizing the location of their stories with the state signature.

Executive Editor, Homes and Gardens

The Executive Editor for the Homes and Gardens sections is a native of West Virginia who considers himself a Southerner. He says the magazine defines Southerness according to lifestyle, as people with similar values, and as taste that's comfortable and casual. The magazine is designed to show the South as it is seen by Southerners and in a positive light. The magazine does not emphasize trends but rather focuses on having a good, comfortable life. He sees the magazine's role in this respect as leading some while responding to readers who have a good story to tell. He says the staff-based writing as a key component to the magazine's being rooted in Southerness.

He sees the Garden Section as being particularly Southern because it is completely based on the climate of the South, which is conducive to distinctive types of plants that will not grow in other parts of the country and which is not conducive to other types of plants. As a result, the South itself forces a Southern garden to fit into a

particular mold, and the Garden Section of *Southern Living* just helps readers understand and develop Southern plants. He says that the Garden Section does not have a strong advertising base, but it is very popular with readers.

The Homes Section is rooted in a sense of place. He says it is the people and the locations of their homes that make the Homes Section Southern. He emphasizes that *Southern Living* is not particularly interested in the history of old homes or in focusing on antebellum architecture. Instead, the home ideas featured in the magazines have to offer ideas that people can use in their own homes. He also notes that outdoor living is a key component of home design in the South, with porches and outdoor living spaces bringing together the Homes and Gardens sections.

Travel Editor

The Travel Editor (TE) is a self-described eighth-generation Alabamian whose previous magazine experience includes seven years in New York at *Vanity Fair* and *Forbes*. He sees the magazine's definition of Southerness as coming directly from the readers. In fact, he sees a dip in response to stories in which the magazine takes the lead in initiating a subject. He sees the job of the magazine as writing about things that mean the most to people. For the Travel Section, that takes the form of providing the service of travel information that people can really use. His example is a story on 10 great hotels for less than $100. He recognizes that the magazine covers areas that might not traditionally be considered very Southern, such as Oklahoma or Delaware because they have a lot of readers in those areas. The magazine is deliberate about diversity of age, of gender, and of race. *Southern Living* does not focus on history in their storytelling because they don't

find it to be of particular interest to their readers. He thinks people read the magazine for two reasons: (1) because they're proud of the South and (2) because it's a good magazine. The second reason probably has greater weight with readers in the border states.

Livings Editor

The Livings Editor has been at the magazine since 1988 and has observed many changes at the publication. When she first came to the magazine, its pages conveyed more nostalgia for the past, but now it is a lifestyle American magazine that reflects the modern South. A native of West Virginia, she considers herself a Southerner. Before taking over the Livings Section, she worked in the Travel Section. She defines as Southern anyone born in the South or who has moved to the region. She says the South used to be based on geography, but now it's a state of mind. Her goal is to be able to remove the word "South" and have the reader still know that it is a Southern magazine. To her, the key is taking Southern icons such as porches, hydrangeas, or heirloom tomatoes and approaching them from a fresh angle. She sees the job of the Livings Section as capturing the pride of a state. "The magazine was founded to showcase Southern positives," she says, "but that's harder to do in the service sections. In Livings, we're preaching to the choir. We show people how very, very cool the people and places of their states are." While the Travel Section is geared to attracting people to a location, the Livings Section is geared to people who are already there. Unlike the rest of the magazine, the Livings Sections have not relied as heavily on reader response simply because they did not have as much of it, a trend the editor is working to change because she wants the Livings Sections to be as rooted in reader demands as the rest of the

magazine. Because the Livings Section focuses more on individuals and their stories than the rest of the magazine, she makes a point of asking the people she profiles how their state influences them and of ferreting out what role Southerness plays in a particular story. She thinks people want to have that sense of belonging. In a way, the magazine plays a role in creating that sense as it balances educating newcomers to the South with maintaining the interest of longtime residents and readers. She sees the "Southern Journal" page as an important element in defining the Southerness of the magazine because it brings out an individual Southerner's storytelling voice.

Food Editor

The Food Editor grew up as a military kid, starting in South Dakota and then moving through Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana. She associates Southerness with hospitality, warmth, family, entertaining, and food. She estimates that 60 percent of recipes come from readers and sees the Food Section as being particularly influenced by reader preferences. The section emphasizes its Southerness through standing columns such as "Taste of the South," which highlights quintessential Southern foods. An important part of the preparation work that goes into the Food Section is done in the *Southern Living* test kitchens. Instead of being designed like large professional kitchens, they are a series of smaller kitchens designed like a home kitchen and stocked with equipment that is commonly found in the average reader's kitchen. The kitchen staff shops for its ingredients at the local grocery store, just as their readers do to be sure that the ingredients and techniques are available and doable.

DISCUSSION

This study is concerned with defining the Southern in *Southern Living* in two ways: with the definition of the term "Southern" itself and with the source of the definition that appears in the magazine, whether reader- or editor-generated. The definition of Southerness is discussed in both the magazines pages and in interviews with its editors. Where that definition comes from cannot be ascertained through analysis of the magazine itself, so the best answer is found in the editor interviews.

Analysis of Methods

The dual methodology of content analysis and semistructured interviewing, though not without limitations, was an effective means of addressing the topic at hand because it looked at both the intent with which the magazine is created and the actual product of that intent.

The chief difficulty of content analysis is deciding which components to analyze. After a preliminary reading of articles, the most obvious quantification of Southerness was a Southern location or use of some variation of the word "South." These elements constitute a geographic definition of Southerness. Other elements of the concept were trickier to pin down but centered on a reflective definition of Southerness. In other words, the magazine served as a mirror reflecting the people of the region to themselves as they read its pages. This reflective or personal aspect was quantified by the presence of people in photographs or personal reference within the story.

There are nuances of definition that cannot be detected using the content analysis described above. As a result, the editor interviews fleshed out the magazine's definition of Southerness and provided the answer to the question of whether the magazine or the readers provide the definition of Southerness that appears in its pages. The direction of that influence could not be determined through content analysis of the magazine itself, as intent and inspiration are not necessarily included in the finished product.

It was the intention of all of the editors interviewed to express a sense of Southerness in their pages, and that sense was conveyed into the final product, as shown by all the sections containing high percentages of at least one mark of Southerness analyzed. However, though all editors claimed their sections were particularly Southern, some sections, such as Food, Homes, and Gardens, did not score as high in Southern attributes analyzed in the content analysis as sections such as Travel, the Feature Well, the Editor's Letter, and Southword. The overall slant of the magazine remained decidedly Southern, but that sense is developed more by some sections than others. Despite being a relatively tiny section at just 2 percent of the editorial content, Southword scored extremely high in overall Southerness and maximized its effect in the magazine by distributing its pages throughout the other sections, thus upping the perceived Southerness of the other sections.

Also, in comparing the sections' scores from 2005 to 2006, there was a general trend toward higher scores in the elements analyzed (personal reference, people in photography, specific Southern location, mention of the word "South) from one year to the next. Adding to this trend was a shift toward more editorial pages for the most overtly

Southern sections such as Travel, and a decrease in pages for the less Southern sections of Homes and Gardens. These changes seem to indicated an even bigger push toward a display of Southerness in the pages of the magazine.

Overall, each research method illuminated the findings of the other and, in combination, offers insight into *Southern Living*'s definition of Southerness as well as the source of that definition.

Defining Southern

The selection of article attributes to be recorded and analyzed was based on components that reflect personality and location, two aspects of defining a regional culture. The coded attributes for personality were personal reference and the appearance of people in photography. The coded attributes for location were specific Southern location or use of some variation of the word "South." Between the personal and locational identifications, the stories relied more heavily on the locational to establish the Southerness of the stories. The idea is that if something happens in the South, it is, by virtue of location, Southern. Of course, the magazine must maintain a coherent concept of Southerness in what it labels explicitly Southern by using the word in order to maintain reader credibility. When it comes to the personal identifications, it is possible simply to report something a person has done without labeling it Southern any further than its inclusion in *Southern Living* magazine implies. But because the editors see the magazine as a reflection of its readers, the incidence of personal reference is important because each personal story or real person portrayed in its pages helps the magazine meet its

readers expectations for the South they see in *Southern Living* to match the South they see around them.

Certain sections ranked consistently high in one or more of the coded attributes. Among these are the Editor's Letter and Southword, both of which scored 100 percent and the Travel Section, which scored 99.3 percent. The Special Sections and Feature Well were not far behind with 91.4 and 91.0 percent respectively. In comparing the distribution of editorial pages among the sections in 2005 and 2006, these sections that scored particularly high in Southern attributes were also the ones that maintained (as in the case of the Editor's Letter, Southword, and the Feature Well) or increased (as in the case of the Travel Section and Special Sections) their percentage of editorial pages. In the same way, These sections can be seen as strongly reinforcing the idea of Southerness in the magazine as a whole while allowing the other sections more leeway for practical service articles, although all the sections analyzed increased or maintained their levels of including at least one element of Southerness analyzed, resulting in an increased focus on these elements during the redesign period of 2006.

The editors for each of these sections define Southerness in terms of the section's subject matter whether it is the Travel Section highlighting particular Southern locations, the Garden Section explaining the nuances of plant care in the Southern climate, the Food Section discussing traditional Southern cuisine, or Homes emphasizing the importance of a comfortable living space and hospitality. The Editor's Letter, however, serves as a major source for the magazine's definition of Southerness. Because the magazine is very service-oriented, most of the articles focus on practical advice and might only include an

occasional aside about the ideas of Southerness that are influencing content. The Editor's Letter, however, is an opportunity for the editor himself to communicate his intentions for the magazine directly to the readers, and he often used that forum to discuss the idea of Southerness. Southword is the most explicitly Southern section because it strays from the strict service focus of the rest of the magazine and allows for personal essay and the telling of personal experiences that are unique to the South. It adds a very personal touch and brings out the voice of a particular individual, thus reinforcing the reflective nature of the magazine.

Themes that recurred throughout the interviews were the importance of service, Southerness, and seasonality to each story in the magazine. The editors defined Southerness in a variety of ways, but many of theses definitions can be reduced to comfort, whether comforting food, a comfortable home, or the comfort of seeing familiar places. Comfort, by these explanations, usually means the cozy feeling that comes from encountering something familiar that the reader enjoys and wants others to appreciate.

This sense of comfort is especially evident in the Livings section and in the state signatures. These portions of the magazine appear in editions aimed at specific states and include stories specific to those states. In this way, readers of these pages are sure to see people and places of special significance to themselves, reaffirming the sense that *Southern Living* is a magazine that cares about them specifically and is reflective of their personal lives. The Livings section does this overtly by placing an entire package of stories on that state in a specially marked section. The state signatures do this more covertly by including state-specific stories within the regular sections so that readers from

those states see their state reflected favorably and might not even realize that those stories are not running in all editions of the magazine.

The editors were all consistent is stating that they are intentional about publishing stories that are distinctly Southern. The question "What's Southern about it?" is asked of every story published. It meets one of the three requirements editors named for articles: Southern, Seasonal, Service. The focus on seasonality also often reinforces the Southerness of stories because the South's distinct regional seasons affect the timing of stories in the magazine. *Southern Living* can proudly herald the beginning of spring in February when national magazines are still focused on winter. A sense of family, home, and tradition are also ideas that emerged, but several editors were careful to emphasize that the magazine is not concerned with tradition in the form of history or looking back to the past but rather at traditions as they are continued in the present.

Overall, the definition of Southerness used by the editors of *Southern Living* that emerged from this data is (1) pertaining to a geographic region known as the South, and (2) conveying a sense of comfort through food, people, places, and even plants with which readers in the defined region are familiar.

Locating the Origin of the Definition

The question of direction of influence in defining Southerness between the magazine and its readers was answered in the editor interviews. While it might be possible to gauge how readers receive the ideas presented by the magazine by interviewing large numbers of readers, all of the editors stated clearly that the magazine seeks to reflect the interests and desires of its readers. They focus heavily on reader

research and feedback, so it is their intention to reflect the definition of Southerness embraced by their readers. They live in the South, are almost all native Southerners, and have a consistent definition of Southerness. Most will acknowledge trying to influence readers in small ways, but mostly through new twists on old ideas. They are careful to keep any attempt by the magazine to lead subtle and gradual, and even then the flood of reader responses are overwhelming in shaping the publication's editorial course.

This tendency on the part of regional magazines to follow rather than lead was documented by Ernest C. Hynds in his study "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways." He writes, "Some city magazines are engaged in aggressive journalism, including investigative reporting, but most tend to emphasize providing information about lifestyles and the good life for their generally affluent audiences."[99] Hynds' study describes city magazines as service providers, not change agents. This pattern is clearly seen in *Southern Living*'s editorial focus on service and the hesitancy of editors to lead their readers.

A hesitancy to promote change was also noted by John Shelton Reed in his article on "Southern Living" for *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*." He writes, "it [*Southern Living*] reflects its readers' sensibilities and seldom attempts to shape them, except by an occasional nudge."[100] And the nudge he describes is hardly a call to radical social change. Instead, it's the suggestion that, perhaps, azaleas are overused in Southern gardens. This observation is borne out in the editor interviews in which an example of leading the readers was to introduce the Thai flavor of lemongrass to a catfish recipe. As

[99] Ernest C. Hynds, "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways," 622.
[100] John Shelton Reed, "Southern Living," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 974.

that same Executive Editor for Foods explained, the magazine is so reader-focused that he views his job as working for a client.

Building on Previous Studies

In the review of literature, the importance of a shared "subcultural language" in the social-system element of diffusion theory is established by Rogers in *Diffusion of Innovations*.[101] He writes:

> "When they share common meanings, a mutual subcultural language, and are alike in personal and social characteristics, the communication of ideas is likely to have greater effects in terms of knowledge gain, attitude formation and change, and overt behavior change."[102]

As a result, it is important to note that all of the editors interviewed for this study consider themselves native Southerners, and all currently live in the South. The magazine's region and its themes belong to the editors in a personal as well as professional sense. As a result, the editors have an intuitive level of understanding about the cultural context of the South and how to effectively communicate with other Southerners that is rooted in their own cultural identification of Southerners, which Rogers refers to as "subcultural language" and notes is an effective means of diffusing ideas through a social system.

Indeed, this sense of personal identification with the readers by the editors was a named reason for *Southern Living*'s success when it was purchased by Time Inc in 1985:

> "As Time Inc. president J. Richard Munro put it in 1985, the Southern Progress Corp. magazines 'have achieved success because their staffs are

[101] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 19.
[102] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1983), 19.

> close to their readers, recognize their needs and serve them more effectively than the national magazines with which they compete.'"[103]

This effective understanding of its readers and their desires has maintained the magazine's success through its 43-year history.

All of the editors interviewed stated that they look to readers in developing content for the magazine and follow the readers' cues for defining Southerness. Although the editors' own identification as Southerners must be considered in understanding how they develop the idea of Southerness within the pages of the magazine, Steven H. Chaffee's study on mass media and interpersonal channels has established that personal communication is not necessarily preferable to mass communication for diffusing ideas, so long as the mass media, in this case a magazine, is accessible and offers good information.[104] Because *Southern Living* has established itself as the premier magazine about the South, it meets both of these criteria and as such has the potential to be quite influential among its readers. It is interesting to note that the magazine also includes many personal touches that make even this mass media communication seem geared directly to the individual. These techniques include the use of state-specific signatures and the frequent requests for reader feedback and participation in the editorial process from picking the top 10 Southern travel destinations to submitting recipes for publication.

When Rogers explores diffusion within organizations he breaks the process into two principle categories: initiation and implementation.[105] At *Southern Living* the first

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[103] David Davies, "Southern Living" in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, 348.
[104] Steven H. Chaffee, "Mass Media and Interpersonal Channels: Competitive, Convergent or Complementary?" 72.
[105] Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 370.

stage, initiation, occurs in the editors' deliberate decision to draw their definition of Southerness from their readers. The second stage, implementation, occurs when that definition is integrated into the pages of the magazine through reader contributions, state signatures, and an emphasis on Southern location and people.

Ernest Hynds concluded city magazines function as service providers but not as change agents within a community,[106] and that observation holds true at *Southern Living* as the editors tend to place themselves behind the changes in the region and not as leaders of that change. They might serve as trendsetters, a role Hynds also noted, in prompting readers to consider new takes on old ideas, but this approach is really marketing the usefulness of the magazine, and not serving as a change agent within the region.

Unlike the magazines surveyed by John P. Hayes, in which content was mainly provided by freelance contributors, [107] *Southern Living* is almost entirely staff written. Editors stated that this approach allows them to maintain a unified voice for the magazine but also to own completely all the works, which can then be repurposed for the Web, bookazines, or books.

Although this study did not include the same variables as examined in Renee Martin Kratzer's surveyed of city and regional magazines, [108] it did consider some overlapping factors, namely a personality reflective of the particular region represented by the magazine and stories on local issues. Kratzer found these two attributes to be key in determining excellence in city and regional magazines, and this study has examined

[106] Hynds, "City Magazines, Newspapers Serve in Different Ways," 622.
[107] Hayes, "City/Regional Magazines: A Survey/Census," 294–295.
[108] Kratzer, "Qualities of Excellence in City and Regional Magazines," 161.

Southern Living's personality in-depth and determined that it is indeed reflective of its region and that all the stories are tailored to local interests.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study examined the editors' definition of Southerness through interviews, but in order to have a complete view of the process, it would be beneficial to research reader perceptions of the magazine. This study could look at the readers' definitions of Southerness and whether they feel those definitions are reflected in the magazine content. Further research could explore the ways in which the editors understand readers' definitions and how readers interact with the content the magazine provides.

Customizing the magazine to the readers' expectations is central to the editors' goals for the publication, and a significant way that is accomplished is through the state-specific signatures and Livings sections. This study included discussions of these parts of the magazine with editors, but it did not do a content analysis of these sections because of a lack of access to all editions of every issue of the magazine analyzed. Further research could be done examining the role of these sections in enhancing the personalized, Southern feel of the magazine by comparing the content of the various editions.

It might also be valuable to look at the magazine from a historical perspective to determine how its definition of Southerness has changed over the course of the magazine's decades-long history. Anecdotal comments from editors with a long tenure at the magazine suggest that the definition has changed and continues to evolve, based on the changing nature of the South and the magazine's readership. Because this study has

established that the magazine takes its cues for defining Southerness from its readers, further study could examine how that definition has changed over time.

Conclusions

The definition of Southerness espoused by the editors of *Southern Living* is one that they see as coming from their readership, but in interviews they did admit to not including the whole picture of the South. The magazine intentionally focuses on the positive aspects of life in the South and stays away from issues that hint of controversy. This practice is common in city and regional magazines, as previously established by Ernest Hynds. Among the magazine's educated, upper-middle-class readers the positive picture is surely a pleasing image and is most likely in keeping with their own notions about the Southern experience. For example, a Southerner reading an article about the Grove at Ole Miss would certainly be aware of the riot that took place on campus in 1962 when the university was integrated. However, that same Southerner would also have many other connotations surrounding Ole Miss, from football rivalries to friends (or even themselves) who attended the university. These other connotations are relevant to their lives now, so, though readers and editors may both be fully aware of negative associations with the university's past, neither would see a need to include the history with an account of Ole Miss' current charms. The magazine reflects this focus on readers' current needs and portrays within its pages the type of idyllic lifestyle its readers aspire to, even if they don't achieve it. Through reader research, the editors have discovered that readers don't like history articles, and they don't like negative portrayals

of their region. So the editors don't include this aspect of life in the South in the pages of the magazine.

In fact, the magazine focuses its portrayal of Southern life around content that can produce advertising revenue: travel, homes, food. It is a service-oriented magazine that strives to meet its readers' expectations, but it is also a commercial venture that needs to turn a profit in order to continue operating. Although the content analysis showed that sections that scored high in their level of Southerness maintained or increased their page counts from 2005 to 2006 while sections with a low score decreased in page count, it is not possible to determine if there is a cause between the level of Southerness and prominence in the magazine. As the Executive Editor for Homes and Gardens noted in his interview, Gardens did not have a strong advertising base, despite being popular with readers. Therefore, the editorial shift from 2005 to 2006 might have been a simple business decision, rather than the result of an increased attention to the Southerness of the magazine. There is a correlation but no clear cause and effect.

The magazine's redesign is another example of the editorial focus on Southerness as a sense of comfort with the familiar. A redesign by its nature alters the familiar, but it is necessary to update a magazine's design from time to time to keep it fresh and relevant, but a magazine based on comfort with the familiar must approach that task carefully. The tweaking of design, department names, and the adding of the new section "Inspirations" did not occur in one big sweeping change. Instead, these alterations were rolled out over the course of the year. The magazine's look might have changed, but it did so gradually without jolting visual shifts that would throw readers off in their

expectations of the magazine. In this way, the redesign itself was consistent with the editors' definition of Southerness within the magazine.

Overall, the magazine is effective in establishing its Southern identity through geography and through reflecting its readers' views of themselves. It serves the traditional role of a regional magazine in showcasing the positives of its region, but its emphasis on responsiveness to readers and customization of the magazine by state make it particularly successful.

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APPENDIX A

Content Analysis Form

Month/Year: _____ Page #:_____ No. of Pages:_____

Structure: Well Department Special Section:_____

Type: Travel Garden Food Home Southword Directory

Personal: yes / no

Topic: _____

People in Photos yes / no Comments: _____

Southern Location yes / no _____

South* yes / no _____

Page #:_____ No. of Pages:_____

Structure: Well Department Special Section:_____

Type: Travel Garden Food Home Southword Directory

Personal: yes / no

Topic: _____

People in Photos yes / no Comments: _____

Southern Location yes / no _____

South* yes / no _____

Page #:_____ No. of Pages:_____

Structure: Well Department Special Section:_____

Type: Travel Garden Food Home Southword Directory

Personal: yes / no

Topic: _____

People in Photos yes / no Comments: _____

Southern Location yes / no _____

South* yes / no _____

APPENDIX B

Oral Consent Script

As part of my graduate work at the Missouri School of Journalism, I'm conducting research for my thesis, *Defining the Southern in* Southern Living. My research is a combination of content analysis of the magazine itself and interviews with its editors. The goal is to understand the magazine's definition of "Southern" and the techniques used to define that concept for its readers. I'd like to interview some editors from the magazine to gain a personal perspective on how the magazine is put together. Would you mind being one of the editors that I talk with about the magazine? It will take about 30-45 minutes. Your comments and answers will be attributed to you and included in my thesis, which will be available to the public. I'd be happy to answer any questions or address any concerns you have about the interview ahead of time.

I can be contacted at
[For purposes of publication, contact information has been removed.]

The University of Missouri Institutional Review Board can be contacted at
Phone: (573) 882-9585
FAX: (573) 884-0663
483 McReynolds
Columbia, MO 65211
umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

APPENDIX C

Interview Transcripts

Executive Editor, Travel and Livings

A. So, yeah, I had actually worked here out of college, this is 1993 and I, um–

Q. At Southern Living?

A. Yeah. I was a production assistant.

Q. Okay.

A. In fact, my office is right across the hall. I only moved about 8 feet, you know.

Q. That's kind of crazy.

A. Yeah, I know. But it was – that was spring of '93, and I worked here for about a year and a half was all as a production assistant, and then I went to graduate school for my MFA.

Q. Oh okay. Really? In --

A. In creative writing.

Q. See, that's the kind of degree I would like to have.

A. Really?

Q. I think that would be awesome.

A. It was fun. It really was a lot of fun, and I think it – you know, I do think it helped me in some ways. In some ways it didn't because it – I think it gears you up to be a teacher is probably the most common route, but it did help me a lot with the editing process, I think. Because you did a lot of, you know, besides the reading classes and what not and the writing classes it was just, you know, reading people's stuff and commenting on it and that back and forth that we do all the time.

Q. Okay.

A. So I did that, and then I went to Dallas and I was the managing editor of D Magazine.

Q. Oh, really?

A. It's a city magazine in Dallas.

Q. Oh, Okay.

A. Yeah. And that was fun, and then I came back here to – I was in Dallas for 3 or 4 years and then I came to Birmingham (CID) HotDots, which I don't know if you've heard about, but we did that (CID) magazine.

Q. I did. I worked with [another editor] for a while.

A. Oh, did you?

Q. (CID)

A. Oh , [editor]. She's one of my favorite people.

Q. Yeah. She was a lot of fun.

A. Yeah. Do you keep up with her?

Q. Yeah, some. I hear she's got a new job –

A. Good!

Q. -- with a production company somewhere around town. (CID)

A. That's what I was going to ask, if she had gotten anything. I didn't know if she –

Q. I just heard that earlier this week, actually. I'm not sure how long she's had it.

A. I need to get in touch with her. I haven't talked to her in a while. Um, yeah, so I did HotDots and that went away. Then I went to Health. Um, and then I came here about – it was actually October of '02 so it's been about 4 years.

Q. Okay. Awesome. So you've had a long couple of (CID)

A. Pretty much. Yeah. I sort of kept in touch with some of the people up here. I kind of envisioned coming back here at some point. You know, it took me 5 years, but I did so –

Q. Okay. Well one of the things I'm trying to get at in my thesis, like I've had an interest in city and regional magazines so I did a lot of stuff with that.

A. Right.

Q. When I was in Missouri I worked for the Missouri Association of Publication.

A. Oh, really?

Q. Yeah. And if you're looking at regional magazines, you know, Southern Living is, like, kind of by itself and then there's everybody else.

A. Right.

Q. And so one of the things I want to look at is, like, how it defines itself as a southern magazine, when it has such a broad readership base. How does it keep root in that regionality?

A. Yeah.

Q. I guess is what I'm looking at. So how – if you had to define, kind of, what southern is, how would you approach that?

A. Well, that's a good question. I mean, for me, it's a lot of things. One thing I think we try hard to do is to – a couple of thoughts: One is that we try to write and convey a very relaxed tone, a very relaxed feel to our magazine. We try to be very much a realistic magazine. In terms of – we're not, we don't try to do things that are overly stylized or that are formal feeling or that are so perfect that they look absolutely made up.

Q. Okay.

A. A good example might be something – that actually for us is fairly stylized – but, you know, a lot of magazines for a Thanksgiving cover are going to have maybe a more formal look than this. That's not even one of the better examples (CID). I mean this is just a throw-away example for you but, I mean it's not (CID). You know, some food stylists at other magazines would really take that out, you know, that that would be an imperfection, but we're really interested with kind of showing, and this is just within the foods arena, how people (CID) what things really look like – that's a better example because this, whatever this is, cornbread or something, is broken apart. And that may sound kind of (CID) but it's true. If we're trying to – we try to do this magazine I think where it feels like a friendly conversation with readers, as opposed to a (CID) down approach to them. You know?

Q. Do you think that's something that makes it particularly southern or is that the feel of Southern Living, and then it uses other things? Or is it just the name that says –

A. No. Well, I do think that's something that makes it southern in that – you know I think the South is a casual place. It's a relaxed place to me. You know, there's north, I mean I know when I was in Vermont, it's not exactly Manhattan or anything, but you know people comment on when they come down here how, you know everybody moves a little bit slower and takes things a little easier and talks a little slower and whatever they do. And that's the idea of a relaxed atmosphere (CID) and we try to convey that in our pages.

Q. Is it mostly just pictures, or is it something you use the words to convey?

A. I think the words also. I mean, our editor's letter, for instance, from [editor], our editor in chief, he writes "Dear Friends." You know, that's just entry into the letter. You know, it's just a little thing but I think it's significant because it sort of shows the relationship we want to have with readers. Other things, yeah, you know, another example is language we use that is really Southern. I'll try to find something for you because I know we've got it in page it's just a conversational language. And I think we also – we're not always – we are grammatically correct, but we'll use some (CID) and some sort of, I don't know if "slang's" the write word, but we'll use real informal language. You know, things like, " Boy! You ought to check this out!" Or something in a caption or, "You wouldn't believe, blah blah blah." You know, where it's not trying to be so official as much as it is just kind of, like talking over the backyard fence. That's kind of the way I've talked about it sometimes to our writers, about capturing that sense of just having a conversation with your neighbors as opposed to trying to craft something that's going to be incredibly beautiful. We do a beautiful language in the book, but we also like, you know, that sort of just friendly exchange. There's some little (CID) and things that—I'll find an example for you.

Q. Okay. And I'm seeing some of this stuff when I'm reading it as well.

A. Yeah.

Q. Because, like different subjects will come up that you might not hear in other magazines, that sort of thing.

A. Yeah. I think you're right. I mean, we do a lot of it, um – but we can talk and I'll kind of flip through here because I'll find something.

Q. Okay. Sounds good. So how do you think – I guess you consider yourself a southerner because you're from Birmingham. Right?

A. Yeah.

Q. How do you think that influences your work with the magazine? Like are most people here southerners, or do you have people come down from Vermont --?

A. We do have a lot of southerners in here for sure, um, but we have a lot that aren't.

Q. Really?

A. Yeah, we do. We've got, um, folks from all over. Claudia Han, who is our acting art director from – I want to say she's from Idaho. I'm not positive. I know they lived in Idaho. I think she might be from the Northeast originally, but she lived in Idaho. There's a lot of examples of people that are from, you know, either parts of the country here. But even those that come here from somewhere else, I think they – our editors are really adamant about Southern Living maintaining it's distinctiveness .

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You know, there's a million magazines out there that do homes and foods and gardens and travel.

Q. Right.

A. And that, you know, anybody can do a flower arrangement. Anybody can do, you know, some kind of quick week-night meal story. Anybody can do a lot of this stuff, but we like to think that only we can lure the market on doing it the way that taps in the way that we recognize as a southern and distinct lifestyle I guess.

Q. Okay.

A. So I do think it comes to bear, I think, to get back to your question on being a southerner, I think it does come to play out on the pages, because we all have some sort of familiar experiences in our background. I mean when we have certain stories that we show at our story conference, we go through all the pictures – we have these meetings month-to-month. I'm not sure how (CID) does this. We all get together in the same room and go through the pictures. The writer presents the story and talks about what it's going to be. There are so many times when people have very specific knowledge about that. You know?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. It might be a story on Destin, Florida, and you'll hear five people say, "Oh, yeah. I remember that condo. I used to go there when I was a kid." I've been in there before – this happened more than once – and I've seen – both times it's been my wife's family. She has a really big family in Louisiana. I've seen her cousins in stories twice since I've been here, and nobody here knew they were – nobody had any idea that was my wife's cousin. One was a story in Vicksburg, where we have a lot of family, and one was a story in Shreveport, where we've got a lot of family. And the writers are going through showing pictures and I'm saying, "Oh. That's cousin Logan," or, "that's cousin Emily." And those were six months apart, but that happens more than you would think, you know?

Q. Really?

A. Yeah.

Q. That's kind of cool.

A. It is. And we use – and also as southerners, one of the things that we do a lot of is we use local – I mean we very much, this magazine uses a lot of local sources and local contacts for stories.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And so being a southerner helps you there because – I mean I know a lot of

people, obviously I know a lot of people in Birmingham, but I know a lot of people in Dallas. I know a lot of people in Mobile. We all kind of have different areas – one of our (CID) is from West Virginia and knows a lot of people up in Virginia. Another one is from Texas. Another one is from Mississippi, so we kind of all can tap into these local sources in a way that maybe we couldn't if we weren't southerners.

Q. Okay.

A. But I don't think you have to be a southerner to be a good, strong contributor here at all. You just kind of have to know what the magazine wants to do.

Q. Right. So do you feel like it's like any subject you're going to get into, you just have to know your subject area and work with it from there? Or is it different from that?

A. Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think it is like any subject area in that you just have to kind of know who your audience is, know what you're trying to do, and know what makes it different from what 14 other magazines are doing and then kind of execute it that way. When we do our travel stories, you know, the areas that I'm over are travel and living, which are our regional inserts that we do, and you know, you could do any magazine in America could do a travel story on Charleston, and they all do.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. But I think we do it a little differently because of a few things. I mean, one is that we go to Charleston all the time. I mean we have a defined region that we're covering, so when you revisit a place many times, you've to each time find something different and something fresh. So I think a national magazine might be more inclined to just sort of do a story on Charleston that hits some of the high points that probably everybody would talk about, you know?

Q. Uh- huh.

A. You know, going down to the battery and to eat at (CID) Grill and you know, walk along Kings Street, and we write about those things too but we also find new things. Like, there's an incredible new bridge linking Charleston and Mount Pleason. You can rent a bike and ride your bike across and then take a water taxi back across, which is by, at sunset and you know, we're trying to dig a little deeper because we do so many stories in the same areas again, you know .

Q. So do you feel like when you're writing travel stories do you direct them at people, say, who live in Texas and might want to visit Charleston, or would you direct it to people even living in Charleston and say you should check this out? Is it more like a travel idea, like you should go to this place? Or is it something that you're also looking to appeal to the locals with?

A. Well, it depends. It depends on how the story's running and I don't know -- one thing I was going to mention to you, and I don't know how much you know about this,

but we do regional additions.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. You know about all that?

Q. I've been told some but you could probably (CID) better on it.

A. Well, we do anywhere from , I think it's 17 to 21 editions of each month's magazine. When we leave I can show you where they all are just to give you an example, but here's an example of how it works: You know how every magazine has it's own lingo? Our lingo is, these are (CID) stories, meaning they are in every copy of the magazine that goes out, so every reader is getting these stories about jazz clubs in DC.

Q. Okay.

A. But when you flip over here, see it says Texas 4? This is what we call Texas state signature. So you've got an x-number of stories that only went to Texans. So this is about (CID) in Mississippi. Texas 6, this story only went to Texans. This story only went to Texans about this highway in Arkansas.

Q. So how do you decide which stories are going to Texas, since it's about Mississippi and Arkansas?

A. Well, we do it and then – let me tell you what this is, SLS, that's select. So this is story went to upper-income. They have a way in circulation determining upper incomes, their area codes, zip codes. And so we've got all the states and then we have select, and so a certain number of upper-income people got this story.

Q. So SLS is select?

A. Just select. Yeah.

Q. So S-L, does it stand for something?

A. I guess just "Southern Living Select." It's really an internal lingo. You know, readers – our hope is, I mean it's not a big deal, but we kind of hope and most of the time I think it's true -- readers don't really even notice it. And I think that buys us a lot of fans because if you live near natural bridge taverns in San Antonio and you're flipping through this magazine saying, " Oh my gosh! This is so cool. They've got a whole story just on – you know they don't really realize that it's only Texans getting it but –

Q. Right.

A. It makes them feel this connection with us, you know?

Q. Okay.

A. As far as how we choose which stories, it's kind of, I mean, it's geographic . You know, we wouldn't do a – it's really rare that we would run a Virginia story in Texas because they're so far apart. I mean, you might do a Mississippi story in Texas or an Arkansas story in Texas or sometimes you might base it on, looking at this map, I mean, you might do an – a good example is in the summer sometimes, we'll run a story that's somewhere here in Alabama on
I-65 –

Q. Uh-huh.

A. We'll run it, say in Nashville and Kentucky, because a lot of people are driving on I-65 towards the beach in July. So if we have a story on some place that's a great place to stop and buy peaches on the way to the beach, that makes sense. You know?

Q. Okay.

A. But we wouldn't run some random little peach stand in Virginia, we wouldn't run in Texas at all. We'll sometimes do it like if a new Native-American museum at the Smithsonian opened in DC. That's one we could run all over the South because it's such a big destination. Of course, something with Disney or something with New Orleans, you know certain, like, A-list places, you know : New Orleans, Charleston, Atlanta, that can probably appeal to everybody. Others are like, you know, this little highway in Arkansas, that only could go to Arkansas, maybe Texas, maybe Oklahoma or something like that.

Q. Okay.

A. But we hope that gives us a real localized approach that helps enhance that southernness, you know, because we're kind of – it gives us the pages to write about things that wouldn't be on other people's radar, you know. We're not saying that this is the world's greatest thing and everybody in the South ought to go there, you know. That's why we only ran it in Texas, you know?

Q. Right.

A. Other stories that are full run we are saying, you know, that it's really something – let me see what our lead was this month. I've forgotten .

Q. So then does every state have it's little customizations like that?

A. Yeah. We have 17 states and DC, and they all have their own, you know, the ability for us to customize each one of them.

Q. So how many travel stories would you say is usually written in public total versus each issue will have x-number of travel stories? Is there usually a big difference between, you know, "We publish 20 but each states maybe only gets 10?"

A. You mean, um, you mean individual stories?

Q. Right. Like say you did those stories on Mississippi and Arkansas, but the Texas people only saw them, and I'm guessing the Mississippi and Arkansas people --

A. Yeah.

Q. Would see them as well?

A. So how many individual stories?

Q. Do most places get the same number of travel stories or they'll get more –

A. They don't, most places don't get the same because it's based on how many ads are sold.

Q. Okay.

A. You know, like these select, I mean these state signature pages have to supported by advertising so it depends on how many ads they sold that month. now there's no I want to make sure it's clear I mean we have a real church and state separation – there's no relation between the advertising and the editorial in here but they have to have to space –

Q. Right. To put the editorial in?

A. Yeah. And we try to keep a 50/50 ratio. So um the bigger ones tend to be Georgia, Florida --places where we have the most readership, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, Tennessee's big. You know, it can vary sometimes we get big surprises. Texas is big, North and South Carolina are big. Some of the ones that tend to be smaller would be like Oklahoma, Alabama, Kentucky, West Virginia, some of those. And that's really just based on places where we have the most readers, places where we have the most active sales, staff, you know. And then as far as numbers of stories, actually I can show you – this is kind of interesting. I had to take it down (CID)

Q. (CID)

A. Oh, really? (CID)

Q. (CID)

A. This is travel stories in '05 and it doesn't look like – it's funny I've told somebody I could have a contest and win some money because to me it doesn't look like (CID.) There's like 750- something stories in '05 –

Q. Wow!

A. -- that we published. Now, some of them would be – it gets complicated but some

of those might have been different versions of the same story. Because you can write, what we call a three-column – you know we call this a three-column, just, basically that means a one-page story. So in Texas it had a full page. This same story in Oklahoma it's the ad space or difference. Say the ad space had a one column right here, could run as a two-column. They would just kind of cut it a little or turn the picture or something.

Q. Okay.

A. And so they end up calling it, like this is such-and-such version one or such-and-such version two. So it's the same story –

Q. It's just cut a little bit.

A. Cut a little bit or edited differently, laid out differently. But by and large, you know the travel staff here is writing – I'd say most of our travel writers probably write 50 or 60 stories a year, some of them 70 probably.

Q. Wow.

A. Yeah and we've got ten of them, ten travel editors. So it's a lot of work and a lot of people. But it's – I was talking about that whole localized angle, you know, talking over the backyard fence? That's where a lot of that comes from because, you know, writing that many stories and you're writing about places like Fairview, Oklahoma, I mean it's almost like a small-town paper in that respect.

Q. Right.

A. Because you're writing about things that most people aren't, and you can write about it in a tone and in a way that most people don't. I don't know if that really gets to the question, but I think it really increases our sort of southernness, you know?

Q. Okay. That does make a lot of sense. And also the living sections, (CID) just because there's a larger section in there?

A. They do. and the livings are a good example too because the livings have this subtitle, I'm not sure what you'd call it – let me turn and see –"Texas Living People and Places." They all have this (CID), People and Places, and that's really very much what they are. Livings are where we—you know the rest of the book is pretty much service journalism, you know, recipe's, garden tips, home tips, travel tips on how to take a nice vacation. These are really features type stories where we're talking about you know people and places in that state and they're not all – this woman is a pretty successful songwriter. I think she's a Christian songwriter. She's not a "celebrity," but the rest are very much just kind of real people doing interesting things. This is a priest in Harlington who is doing this work with bringing back birds to the Rio Grand Valley and bringing back birding to that area. This is a lady who has this supper-swap thing where she cooks dinner and splits it up amongst her friends and the next week the friends do it and they kind of rotate around. You know, it's just little stories about people doing interesting

things, and we think it really kind of keeps it real, for a lack of a better phrase, you know just kind of keeps it real for people where they recognize it as being a story out of their state and familiar to their state. We try to keep it real with diversity mix. That's another big thing with us in terms of southernness. The South is very much changing and we try to really reflect that. This is the (CID) family, a Hispanic family in San Antonio that has a successful restaurant there. I mean, I think some people's perception of Southern Living, who just look at it – maybe they have a perceived notion or they are thinking about from many years ago. I mean, well think of the South. It's like (CID) Magnolia. Everybody's wearing (CID) skirts and drinking (CID) , you know? We adamantly (CID) that in our content if you really look at it. I mean we could always do better, I'm sure, but we really try to be very aware of diversity and just the progressive South. That's something we're pretty committed to.

Q. Okay. So when you're deciding on stories do you try to get, I guess a diversity of types of people and types of places and kind of have a geographical (CID) issue?

A. Yeah. Absolutely. That's maybe the single biggest thing we do. We do our annual planning pretty far out because we shoot everything in season. Like right now we're shooting fall color.

Q. Okay.

A. And that won't run until next October. So those stories have to be planned more than a year in advance, because you're photographing them a year in advance so you've got to have the plan before a year. So we're starting the process right now, planning all of our big stories for 2008.

Q. Okay.

A. And it all builds up to a meeting we have in January with the executive editors and our Editor in Chief. We'll go away for two or three days and plot out a line-up for the bigger stories, the well-leads – every magazine calls them different things. And sort of our biggest charge is to come up with a diversity of topic but geography, absolutely. I mean we look at each given issue and say, "Well, you can't have 3 well stories in Georgia in the same month." So we'll move things around so you've got one Georgia, one Virginia, one Oklahoma, or whatever it is. We try to hit as many of these readers as we can. And then also you have the diversity quotient too, you know, Hispanic, black, white, this, that, everything in there.

Q. Okay. So how do you decide which states are southern? Before I really started looking at Southern Living and what states are covered, I didn't really look at Oklahoma –

A. Yeah.

Q. or Delaware—

A. Yeah.

Q. Or places like that. When I go to Missouri, you know, I studied in Missouri, but some people are like, "Yeah, we're kind of southern." Or, "We're Midwestern." Or, "We're in the North."

A. Yeah. It's a subjective thing, no doubt. In terms of our northern-most border, the Mason-Dixon line is I think pretty much how it's determined. I'm not, you know, the Southern Living territory has been this map for a long time, so I wasn't apart of that initial decision-making. When we write in places like Delaware and Maryland or Oklahoma, I think you just have to capture what the spirit of that place is. For some people I think it's an aspirational thing. I think some of our readers – I don't know this other than (CID) – but I think some of our readers in Delaware, Maryland, or Oklahoma, they want to feel that southernness, even if it's not all around them.

Q. Okay.

A. I'm writing a story right now on Longwood Gardens, which is actually in Kennet Square, Pennsylvania. It's just six miles north of (CID) Delaware. It's just basically its in the (CID) Valley which is that whole area where the (CID) lived and where (CID) and all these places are so its right there. I mean it's basically six miles across the state line. And some people might say, "That is really a stretch." And I guess in some respects it is. But on the other hand, if we include Delaware as our region, to say that you can't write about Longwood Gardens because it's actually in Pennsylvania, it'd be like saying, "Well, Hoover isn't Birmingham. " Well, technically it's not, but it's right there.

Q. You've got to go there all the time.

A. Right. You've got to go there all the time. And that's the same way they are with Longwood. They go to Longwood all the time. So I think sometimes you're writing about it with a -- tapping into an emotion people might not want to feel, whether it's around them all the time or not. We definitely have stronger affiliation with some areas than others. You go into a place like Oxford, MS as a Southern Living editor and sometimes you – some of our editors have really amazing and funny stories about some of their travels, because they've just been in situations where the whole town came out to see the photo shoot or meet them or whatever. It's really kind of funny. I went to a dinner in (CID) -- I don't know how it happened but I ended up needing to-go, and I didn't really know what it was. I was just there to represent the magazine, and I get to this dinner at this little historic (CID) and I realized that we were the featured attraction, you know, me and my wife, and they had the mayor there and they had the editor of the paper and they all stood up and we came in and they did a big toast to us, and it was really embarrassing. They wrote something on the society page about a Southern Living editor coming to (CID) blah, blah, blah. And so we get that kind of reception in some places and other places, you know, Baltimore – it's a big city. It's on the eastern seaboard. Some people know us when you're out and about, and some don't. That's okay. You just kind of go with it.

Q. Right. One thing I do notice about Southern Living is the readers seem to feel like it's their magazine. It's a very personal relationship they have with the magazine.

A. Yeah.

Q. I mean, the fact that the mayor and the editor of the newspaper felt the need to stand and toast to you as you came in, I mean, that's a big deal. People still say that I work for Southern Living. My grandmother with all her friends, "My granddaughter works at Southern Living."

A. Isn't that funny.

Q. (CID) And so, I guess, is that something you see a lot? What do you think makes people feel that strong connection to the magazine?

A. It is something that we see a lot. I think it's a lot of things. I think it goes back to the casualness with which we do things, kind of real, reality-based stuff. You know, things like using the state signatures to write about things that are in their hometowns that they would never get covered with any other magazine it buys you a lot of affinity with those people. And we've been around a long time. We've got a long history. I think southerners—this is just me talking – but I think southerners, even with the South changing and all the demographic changes and all the stuff that's happening where people are moving down to the South – I mean if you look at demographic shifts and stuff, the Northeast is losing it's population. The South and Southwest are booming. Even with all those changes, I think people still want to feel like the South is a distinct entity. In fact, a lot of times we'll hear from readers who have moved here from wherever- New York, Arizona, you name it – and they move here and they subscribe to Southern Living and they write us and tell us, "You're magazine helps me feel like I really understand where I live, makes me feel a part of it." And that's a really good thing for us. I mean, if we can tap into that feeling of being a part of something unique –

Q. Right.

A. Especially with – and I'm getting pretty far off-field here probably but you can go to any town in America and find an Applebee's and find a Target and find whatever you want and sometimes that's nice when you're traveling because you have the convenience but that (CID) hopefully we keep a hold on something a little more unique.

Q. Do you feel like Southern Living kind of acts as a standard like, "This is what southern life's about." Like we said, people moving from the North kind of using it as, I guess, a guide to what it means to be southern? Or do you feel like you (CID) from more of what southerners are doing now and reflect that in the magazine? So I guess is the magazine more of a leader or a reflection?

A. You know, I think it's both. I mean, I think sometimes we try to lead and tell people about things they may absolutely not know about, and I think other times it's us

looking to them for what their interested in and what they're doing. We do so much reader research. I know y'all do too. But we really make it a big priority, because we don't want to – our editors are very (CID) of the fact that we're, you know, we're a very large magazine. Our circulation is, I think it's now 2.8 million, and with that broad of an audience, we can't ever get too far ahead of them. I think there's a fine line between getting too far ahead of them but also still kind of advancing the conversation a little bit.

Q. Okay.

A. I mean that doesn't give you too definitive of an answer, but I think it's always a balance that we're trying to do. I read a story in that magazine "Weekends" that came out. I was so impressed with that magazine. I really thought they did a nice job of it, even from the first issue. But they had one story that I just couldn't believe, and it was about a (CID) brunch. And I just thought that is so, that's the (CID) of Southern Living, not because it's (CID), I mean sort of in a way, because, I mean I don't know how many people even know what (CID) is. I'm not even sure if I've ever had (CID). I don't want to be quoted. Second of all, how many people still prepare brunch anymore? I don't think, I mean, so if you have this huge pool of people it probably shrinks to this and then if you talk about a (CID) brunch it probably shrinks to this. And there's nothing wrong with that, per say, but are you really giving readers something they're going to use and do? Or is that just a thought that some editor was fascinated with and wanted to do just because they wanted to do it. You know what I mean?

Q. Right. So do you have many stories like, "This would be a great idea!" Then like, "Well, this isn't very southern." Or this doesn't fit our criteria?" Like do you have like a certain bar they have to meet before you will run a story?

A. Well, it's not like a literal – we don't have necessarily definitive thing. I mean it's all kind of a going with your gut feeling. But, yeah. We definitely have people that pitch stories all the time, and we sort of talk about it and say – we talk a lot about what's southern about it. You know, what makes this story southern? Sometimes you can make a story southern even if it's not. I mean you could make a story – probably foods could have some interesting things to say about that. I mean we definitely don't do just southern food. We write about Italian food. We right about Mexican food. We right about all kinds of things, but we might write about them in a way that's southern. Like we might write about them from a family gathering perspective or from a new twist on a Sunday supper type thing. People outside of the South have Sunday supper. So we might give southern twists to certain things. Within in travel, there aren't many stories that we just absolutely aren't going to do. I mean there are some that are obvious. But, you know, we do stories on bars and cocktails and this is jazz clubs in DC, but we always want it to be right for us. Like, we did a story on taking a walking tour of New Orleans. It was a story about famous cocktails in New Orleans and you could walk here and have a (CID) and you could walk here and have something else. You know, some of our really traditional readers were probably thinking, "Oh my gosh. Y'all are promoting drinking." But really I think it was a very successful story for us because it was talking about very

southern things in a very southern place, and we weren't say you have to go and do all of this. I think we have to some evidence that people are interested in it from a southern perspective if that makes sense.

Q. That does. So who is the Southern Living reader exactly? Do you aim more at women? Do you try to aim at men? And kind of what age range are your readers, and what age would you like them to be?

A. We definitely have a majority of women readership. There's no doubt about that. We like to think – our readership is middle-aged. I can't give you an exact number, but I think our median age is something like 52. I'm not positive about that, so you might want to check that before you, you know –

Q. Publish that?

A. Yeah, before you publish that. But we're really interested in, like probably a lot of magazines and you've probably heard this (CID), we're very interested in readership under 45. Because we've really found that when you have a successful story for under 45 readers, more often than not it translates into being successful for readers in all age groups, and that's not quite the case in reverse. Sometimes we have a story that really hits a home run with my parents age but doesn't hit a home run with my age. If you hit a home run with my age, frequently it translates across groups. I'm 36 and so my wife, if she likes a story, there's a pretty good chance that most of the readership will. So I guess "Who is a Southern Living reader?" I think it's women, it's mom's with kids, it's people who are interested in living a really good life in the South, who are very pressed for time and very busy. That's probably increasingly a concern is that they don't have time to – well, for one they don't have time to sit and read a magazine for days on end, but they also don't have time to cook dinner. They don't have time to take a weekend trip. They don't have time do an incredible 2 acre garden. They don't have time to redo their whole house. So they might have time to do a weekend trip or a quick dinner or plant a window box or something like that. And so I think our readers are kind of that young, busy woman, who is trying to juggle a lot of things and still have a good and healthy life as a southerner.

Q. Okay. So what makes her want to go to Southern Living for that as opposed to going to Real Simple or something like that?

A. Yeah. I think, hopefully it's kind of, hopefully we have a –well, for one, I think Real Simple is a really good magazine. They bring a lot to the table. In my view, they've gotten better and better and better over the last couple of years, in my opinion. But I still think that we have a, kind of have a realness about us that doesn't feel as stylized and as choreographed, maybe. You know, we do a lot of things like using convenience products in our recipes. You know, talking about that reader's feeling it's their magazine, we used a lot of reader magazines. It's not like you're going to open the pages and find someone you know necessarily but it's kind of that connectivity between people. We also test everything we do really – and I don't know if Real Simple does or

not – but we test all of our recipes in the test kitchen. I think they test like 6 thousand recipes a year. It's huge and they rate them all and they cook in kitchens, I'm sure you've seen our test kitchens or they're just cooking (CID) Do y'all use –

A. We share (CID)

Q. You know, they're just real people kitchens. They're not Wolfe sub-zero this and this and granite countertops, they're just normal kitchens. So I think hopefully they're coming to us because of that reality base and because of that quality of testing things and that recognition of their time and money. Money also is probably a big driver of it, is that we're very budget conscious. We don't have many rules at Southern Living, but I think one of them is that we don't ever take for granted the cost of something. We write about a lot of expensive places in the travel section in particular, but we're always going to acknowledge that it's expensive and say, "Hey, this is a splurge, you know. If you go stay at the (CID), it might cost you $400 a night, but it's really an incredible place." And we'll say it that way, you know. As opposed to just saying, "Oh, why don't you go spend a week at the (CID)," which some places, that 's kind of how they write about those things. You know?

Q. Right.

A. But hopefully it's an identification with something southern that brings them to us too. You know that feeling like, you know, the magazine is for them and how are people like them and maybe their moms gave it to them and now they're reading it, you know, that kind of pass down thought also.

Q. So in all of this discussing southern in everything, is there anything else that you thought of that I need to know kind of how your process works or how you go about what makes the magazine southern? This is my first interview so I want to make sure I have everything –

A. Yeah. Yeah. I think it's just from we're really, really committed to being what our readers want us to be. I've never worked at a place – and this is really honest – I've worked at 5 or 6 different magazines – and I've never been at a place that had such a commitment on the staff part to thinking about the reader instead of thinking about what they're interested in, you know, what they meaning the editors are interested in. And I think that comes from our editor, because he put this major investment in research and he preaches it all the time about what are readers doing? What are readers thinking about? And I just think a lot of magazines – and not so much at Southern Progress but really New York more – don't quite have that thought processing engrained. I think people get a little more taken with something that catches an editor's fancy, but does it catch a reader's interest? Sometimes not. So I think that's the main identifying thing about Southern Living, from the fact that we read your recipes to the fact that we research all of our stories, the way we do state sigs, locally, the way we – here's another just tidbit example: Our editor has really put insisted on the fact that all readers get a response when they call us or write us or email us. In fact, this is from June '06 and it's just the Travel

Department, and we get these once a month. We're a few months behind here. Reader, Letter, Email, and Telephone Summary. They got 233 readership requests in the Travel Department in June. And so she breaks it out by Reader Compliments and Comments, just people saying "Southern Living is our bible. We have stacks of them (CID)," Um, you know, here's somebody from Los Angeles. after subscribing she would like to move to North Carolina she would like to know our suggestions on where to live.

Q. Really?

A. Yeah. And this is very typical, but every one of these things we responded to and talked to them. Here's some reader complaints. Somebody saying we missed a bunch of wineries in Missouri.

Q. There are a lot of wineries in Missouri.

A. Yeah. We did a story there and she said – you may know some of these (CID) left out a whole quarter of wineries near the St. James area on I44.

Q. I guess that's where she lives.

A. But what makes us a little different, you know, -- (CID) our edit intern in travel got this, has given it to our Missouri state editor, and I guarantee you next time she's up there, she's going to go check it out, and if it's worth it, we'll end up doing a story on it. So it's that very much direct-reader interaction. All of these are things where they've said, "Could you send me a copy of this story?" And we've done it for all of them.

Q. Okay.

A. It's really funny to be up here the day or two before Thanksgiving. The food staff will get calls all day saying, "I've got my turkey in the oven and this is happening." And they'll answer the question on the phone and say, "Oh, you need to do this or that." So I think that kind of reader involvement is what, you know, hopefully keeps it southern and keeps us unique. I don't think there's any magazines where you can just call up an editor and get them on the phone and get an answer out of them or something like that.

Q. Probably not. I'm guessing the staff at Real Simple doesn't tell you how to cook your turkey –

A. Probably not. That's another big thing actually is that we're entirely staff driven. We use very, I mean the amount of freelance can be counted on a couple of hands. I mean it's very, very small. We have this edit staff of 122 people, and I'd say 95 percent or more of our edit content is produced by staffers. And that's probably something I should have mentioned way earlier because that's to help keep everybody focused on the same thing and the same mission. Everybody's in the same meetings. Everybody's hearing the same message, having conversations in the hallways about stories. So we don't have all these different voices from freelancers. We have different voices among the staff, but I mean there's somehow a cohesive message behind that.

Q. So is that like a conscious decision on the part of the magazine? We're going to have it staff written? Because that's unusual in most magazines.

A. Yeah, it is unusual. It's very unusual these days, with the economy the way it is. Yeah, it's very much a conscious thing. I think it makes sense from a reader's perspective because of what I was saying, but it's a good business move too because we own all of our content , every picture, every word, we own. And so we can do things like this. We can repurpose things for the web or, this is what we call an SIP, for bookazines, which are those heavier stock paper things you'll see on the news stands for like ten bucks. All that, it's very easy, not easy, but we don't have to go through all that contractual stuff of contacting freelancers for the design rights and this and that. We can just put it together and do it. So it's a good business move also.

Q. Well, that was really awesome. You gave me some really great information. I appreciate you taking the time.

A. No problem at all. I hope it helps.

Executive Editor, Food

Q So that's the idea of what I am going for in this thesis. Just wanting to talk to you and some of the other editors here to see how you go about taking what you see as Southern and putting it into the magazine. Um, are you a southerner yourself?
A I am.
Q Where are you from?
A I was born in Florida, Central Florida and lived in North Carolina and Georgia; went to college in Mississippi.
Q Where?
A University of Mississippi.
Q Me too. Alright, awesome. Good to know there are Rebels around here.
A Ugh huh.
Q Okay, very cool. Do you think being a southerner influences how you approach the magazine or do you think Southern Living magazine is just like working a health magazine where you learn about health trends and use them in the magazine, and in the southern magazine you learn about southern trends and use them in the magazine? (CID)
A Um, yeah. The answer is yes. I don't think it's required, but I think the answer for me is definitely yes as it relates to food since that is what I do.
Q Okay.
A I am the Executive Editor for food so having some background in whatever it means to be southern, certainly growing up having supper with my grandparents and my in-laws, there was a real sense of southernism around the table so those kind of things influenced me. But if you were a real lover of food and you knew a lot about food, I don't know that you would necessarily have to be southern. We have editors on the staff that are not southern, but know a good deal about what it means to be southern in terms

of food, trends, and aspects of food and ingredients to cooking methods that are inherit to our region. But I don't know that you have to be born here to do it.
Q Ugh huh.
A But for me personally, having been born in the south helps me to some degree have a sense of um, some of the bigger southern things, but there are people, again on our staff who are from outside the south who know more about certain southern towns or certain regional specials than I may know, and I'm from here. So yes it does. But ultimately, you know were hired in Southern Living is unique in a sense that it's a very much reader-base magazine.
Q Ugh huh.
A So unlike other lifestyles (CID) or other magazines, the majority of our recipes come from readers.
Q Okay.
A So it has a much different connection content-wise than other magazines. So were a pretty much based service magazine, a real kind of "week night", kind of a week night supper, quick easy a very doable kind of a tangible kind of guide. Um, getting practical with you is a good way to describe it. We're just kind of actually working for a client. So you know, if I had to write about lawn mower engines; well, I don't know that I would have to…I mean I know I would want to know how to take one apart and put it back together again, but I don't know if I would of had to have the base point of doing that my whole life; (CID) so, as long as what I was writing about would have serviced to the reader, and that is kind of what we feel about food. I mean yes it helps to be southern and have a command of southern food but ultimately we've created a magazine that services other readers.
Q So when your going into your picking your story ideas and the topics you're going to cover and different foods, what all thoughts do you take into consideration when you're saying, "This is a story Southern Living would do, but that's not one."
A Ugh huh, well, the first thing we would do is figure out—which we know from research and feedback from our readers—what our readers are looking for. That's probably the biggest thing that we do here when it comes to plan the story that's right for our readers, and one of those things is its uniquely southern hook. Um, we usually consider three major things: It's got to be southern, seasonal, and have a service component. If it has these three criterias, then it's on the right track. And ugh, each one of those stories, you should be able to check off all three of those. It's very much, in our region; it's very much about cooking and seasons. The majority of our readers are B markets, so, you know there not going to have…most people don't have a Whole Foods around. Most people don't have a gourmet market, so it's seasonally based. It's seasonally class reality based, so people are cooking based on what's fresh in the bins and in the grocery store and local farmers markets. Um, so we tend to do stories around that. We have to be very careful about kind of writing the way with trends, you know we don't—our readers, again, it usually starts on the coast and works its way down to our region.
Q Ugh huh.

A So we have to be forward thinking, but at the same time, we have to bring our readers along kind of slow, just because some of the things we talk about may not be available in their market. So we have to be very careful about that so, you know when I get pictures from the market of PR, you know I always tell them, "We're—you can't pitch to us the same way you would pitch another magazine, or lifestyles because we need to have that unique southern connection." We often times ask ourselves, for instance, in January, we're going to do a soup story, we ask ourselves and do some really critical thinking about it. Well, what are we going to do to it that every other magazine in America—I mean everyone is going to be doing soups and chilies—In January what are we going to do to it that is uniquely southern and be shown in a way that only Southern Living would do it. So we really ask ourselves a lot of the same questions. From a seasonality stand point, we'll do some of the same things that other magazines are doing but will have to put our unique southern spin on it whether it's…

Q Ugh huh

A a recipe. Or whether it's using a convenience product to, um, save you some time and be more "budget friendly" or say, hire the new ability factor for new cooks. Um, you know those are important things that we ask ourselves when were kind of looking at stories.

Q Okay. So you say the starting stance is more something that is really approachable for readers. You don't have to be the gourmet cook?

A Oh no, absolutely; were very much about picking our recipes. I mean hopefully—you know we break our readers into categories: The new cook, the kind of comfortable cook, and the gourmet cook—ideally we like to have each recipe for each reader. But our primary focus is that younger reader, the new cook, who probably has a notion of what they think southern cooking, is, and has the passion or the commitment to cook. You know, their mom is probably the working mom who probably doesn't have time to cook from scratch and may not know how to cook from scratch, but um they feel some conviction of having supper on the table for their families. Our recipes are really geared toward that reader. Obviously, were going to have some entertaining recipes that may take a little bit longer, have a lot more ingredients and cost a little bit more to prepare. But primarily, just like you said, this is a magazine that is all about doability, availability and acceptability for the majority or our readers.

Q So how do you think (CID) I mean you know when you have fried chicken recipe, or the world famous sweet tea, that's one thing. Then you have an Italian night, or Mexican food of different ethnicities that you use for food.

A Ugh huh

Q How do you make sure it has a southern standpoint on it?

A Well, I think for us we—you know the great advantage we have now is the demographics itself. It's very different than it was say ten years ago, twenty years ago, especially from an ethnic stand point. So you have to have these exploding pockets of these Mexican-American's that are southern as I am. You have an explosion of Asian population and you have the Vietnamese down at the Mississippi Gulf Coast. You have the Japanese over in the Carolina's. Um, all of these folks are just as southern as I am. So what we look for are ways to introduce maybe ingredients of flavorful cooking

methods to our readers, but yet, still using ingredients that are familiar to them. So for instance, if it were—let's just say, using a Thai flavor profile, instead of—we could say maybe instead of using the flavor profile but use it with catfish (CID), which is an ingredient that is inherently southern. It's something that our readers have an understanding of. They know what the texture is like when it's cooked. They know how to cook it. But it may just be putting some lemongrass some peppers or maybe some McCormick seasoning that goes on the top of it. Um, Mexican is not really that big of a deal because Texas really comprises a lot of our readership through Southern Living. And anything related to the border "Tex Mex or border food is just, that's just part of our Southern Living make up, and it has been for forever. So I don't really think of Mexican food as being sincerely ethnic for us. We're really seeing a lot of movement in Asian flavors and Asian profiles and ingredients that's really kind of the new wave of things. Um, you know the Italian play, the Italian for as long as I've been here, which is seven years, when we ask our readers what their favorite ethnic food is, Italian is their favorite. So again that is almost a no-brainer. You know I don't with the basic lasagna, I don't know how ours would be particularly southern. We may pair it with some things, but I think the notion in theirs that it's still um, it has to be familiar it has to be comforting. I mean I think that one of the great things about southerners and their food is these ingredients of familiar flavors. Um, and again if we talking about the subject of fried chicken, it may be that were not frying it anymore. We may be oven frying it. Or maybe were um, taking chicken thighs and stuffing them with something and frying it. Its um, friend chicken is kind of going away too. It's not something people go out and get. I don't know that people at home are really frying chicken anymore, especially the younger folks. But, you know taking that same kind of concept and twisting it in a little bit is now health is such a big part of what we do. People are really, our older readers and our younger readers, are really concerned about the healthy aspect cooking and a healthy lifestyle whether it's the younger reader that wants to provide a healthier meal for their family. Or the older reader who's now worried about diabetes, or their cholesterol, or their sodium intake, or any number of things. Um, you know the sweet tea, for example, is always a safe hold.

Q Ugh huh.

A In southern kitchens we find ourselves having to really not run a lot of sweat tea recipes that are made with sugar. Were now using a lot of sugar substitutes. So our sweat tea would normally be made with Splenda because we know that, that is what our readers are doing at home. You know we have to—our definition of southern cooking the bones of southern food will never change. I mean its still going to have a base point of things such as: Collards and ham hocks, you know lots of poultry and fresh vegetables. I wouldn't say contemporary in terms of like upscale, but contemporary in terms of 2006—you know what people were doing to those still makes them uniquely southern. That's relevant just for you know our current reader.

Q Okay. You mentioned the health trends a lot and I happen to notice the healthy living section in what not to do. And that kind of seems like a draw from all different sections in the magazine.

A Oh yeah. It's a lifestyle and not just food, yeah.

Q What's the difference? Is the underlining assumption with that is you know people who read Southern Living magazine who really want to bring them information from all the aspects of their life including the healthy living?
A Well, it would be naïve of us to think that Southern Living is the only magazine that our subscribers are getting at their home. But we do like to think that. I think it is more about dimensionalizing the concept of a healthy lifestyle and not just for our readers. But I know I saw roper just this year that has gone through and done this extensive, extensive survey of all these things of a healthy lifestyle. And they got to the top ten things that people considered part of a healthy lifestyle and food was at the bottom. Well what we're trying to do is couple of things. There are more ways of having a healthy lifestyle other than watching what you eat. Unlike a lot of magazines, the positioning of a healthy context is not…were not using scare tactics. It's not, "If you don't do this, you're going to die." "If you don't do this you're going to get cancer." We're all about you know what it can be anything that you want it to be the fact is whether its gardening or, I don't know, washing your dog, or cooking with something out of the garden. All of those things for different people could be considered a healthy lifestyle. So you know I like to run, but for a lot of readers, walking will be it's just the way it is. Were trying to find things were already doing regularly in our magazine and what we could do to highlight those things and kind of putting in a little more focus in terms of what we could do to highlight those things to better that section. We have a gardening section. And we may be writing a story on how to prune your trees. Well you know what if you step back your actually doing some exercise there. Think about you know there are lots of ways your turning over your flower beds and you know I don't know planting anything, a lot of it is required physical labor that we could then extract out to have a healthy lifestyle and talk about all the benefits that could come along from doing that.
Q Okay. So in the garden section you'll see about this is the time of the year you could tend to the flower beds.
A Yeah.
Q So in the healthy living section, "How to tend to your flower beds and what the steps are to doing it (CID).
A Yeah. Exactly, exactly, exactly. So were just trying to think of things that already exist and highlight the healthy living aspect of those.
Q One other thing I was interested in was the inspirations that you have showing up on the front of the magazines. I know that's something that has been more recent.
A Right.
Q What was the idea behind that at all? Was that just kind of like your introduction to the magazine or how the different sections tribute to that?
A It is. We know that research shows…and its not just for us, it's for all magazines. People are really more interested in about the first third of the magazine. You know we know that's kind of where they're going to be, the first part of the magazine and then they go to the back part of the magazine. And so we felt like we wanted to give in the first part of the book a representation of what's to expect of the rest of the magazine.
Q Okay.

A …In a really big, broad ideas that can have beautiful pictures. Imagery that can stand alone in a full page and just more idea driven and it only takes…we really just rely on the picture of the story as opposed to content. It real, just supposed to be beautiful photography (CID). Um, if you notice we position, we hold those pages open to have advertising that is a little more visually driven. So if a few front pages feel different that add that to the area. It's a little more visual feel so once you get into the book, you've already kind of warmed up to the pages that follow.
Q Have you had any responses to it?
A Yeah, oh yeah. The responses have been great because they're really strong images.
Q Right.
A And we get to handle the pages graphically in a way that we don't handle our other pages in the magazine.
Q Right, so that is something that you have been able to do in addition. Have you had to cut down on a few other sections, like a page for each one or add to it?
A No, we just added to it, yeah.
Q That's awesome.
A But it just depends, on the makeup of the book about what gets in because we plan. You know we plan to usually have a bigger book than what we had before so um, whether we had the inspiration pages or not, the stories would come and go and we would have to plug in based on geographic mix and all sorts of things.
Q So when you're planning these sections, do you try to get a mix of (CID) and more entertaining…do you try to mix up the reader's recipes. Like, well, we had five readers from Alabama, maybe we could…
A Yeah, yeah, yeah. The word that we continually use is really just diversity. To be geographic diversity and subject matter, you can't have five stories on asparagus. You know you can't have one story that has three recipes from Birmingham. So we really have to mix it up. We want to use a variety of recipes as much as possible. It really shooting from anywhere from 65 to 75 percent of all the recipes each month being from different readers.
Q Wow. That's a lot.
A So we have to spend a lot of time thinking about…I feel like most of my job is just moving puzzle pieces around because it really is a giant. And because we have to balance that and if, if were doing a big story on a family in New Orleans,
Q Ugh huh.
A You know our travel department features and gardens, no one else can be in New Orleans. No one else can be in Louisiana.
Q Okay.
A So we have to make sure that first is on a micro level in our section and the big picture being that there is balance throughout all stories in the small department can't be outside. All of them can't be in the country. Or there are stories that are more urban driven and some that are little more say "out in the herb" um there just has to be they all have to look different. They all can't be shot at night, they all can't be outside, you know. They all can't be from the east coast. So the playing part of this is really the most

challenging part is pulling those packages together and doing it in a way that our readers will never…they feel like, every reader feels like we're talking to their region. And that's what's important, you know. Making sure that no one picks up, "Well boy, Texas sure is getting a lot of talk this month." I mean we want it to be a balanced mix of contents.

Q Okay. Is that something…I know in other sections, like Alabama's specific pages. Does each state do that as well?

A Well, we do but it's really more based on the makeup of the magazine. We have 17 different editions of the magazine every month.

Q Okay.

A Um, it's really not that specific to um, the section per say it's how the magazine is bound and the folio fall. Sometimes well have state signature that we have two or three in food, but travel may have ten or fifteen based on the makeup of the book and where the sections fall in the book.

Q Okay. That makes sense.

A It's more production issue than it is.

Q So it's not just planned…

A No

Q …Where you'll have more Alabama for the Alabama pages.

A No, No.

Q Okay.

A It's just, it's a production. It's the way they are when the whole book comes together.

Q Okay that makes sense. Um, if you could define Southern, how would you define it?

A Mm, I don't know how, I don't exactly know how I would define it. It's just kind of feeling. Again, it's like the food I think it is um, you know I don't know that I could make it into one aspect, but just knowing where we come from historically—We're more of an agrarian based economy here. There are a lot of farmers and obviously industries coming in and it keeps changing, but it's a strong tradition of folks using things that come from the land and using every piece and part of that. And um, familiar ingredients, it's comfort food as related to the south. The whole idea of using the importance of almost to giving up other things to make sure that your family meal time is incredibly important. I think that is uniquely southern. Ugh, whether it is ugh, Sunday dinner or super every night, I think the South like a lot of regions there is a lot of emphasis placed on that instead of seeing one of the things that binds us together. Now, in other regions there may be other things that bind those folks together. But for us, it's definitely, food is one of them. That is why its fun to work in the food department because it is such a natural part of what we do. My colleague in Travel, everyone travels, you know and it's much harder to define you know what is uniquely southern travel. Food is one of those things that regardless of where you go in the south, you can engage with anyone about food. Because it's such a strong tradition in our region.

Q Okay.

A And I know that didn't really answer your question, but that is really just the way I can define it. It's just a feeling.
Q That sounds good. Would you say that the magazine—that the magazine is more rated by the readers than getting the (CID)
A Definitely.
Q Would you say that it's more of a trendsetting role?
A I mean we, we like I said all of our editors are real food experts and professionals so that we know what is going on from an international perspective on trends, but that's not what we're going to do in the magazine. It is our obligation and responsibility to be up-to-speed on everything that is happening in the world too. And in digesting that down, and choosing the things that we know our reader can choose today. But generally we know what our readers want because we are using real recipes and the ingredients that they are using at home. So really, you're looking to them to define the trends as supposed to defining the trends which is what we do.
Q Right. Okay. That makes sense. That's one of the things I am trying to make clear in my thesis…
A Yeah.
Q …kind of where the idea of southerness is coming from and how it's different.
A Absolutely. And again, were doing that in all of our departments. It's really a reader base just knowing what the reader wants and giving back to them as apposed to a group of editors sitting around defining what it is that we want to tell them. That's not the way we do it.
Q Okay.
A It's really a bottom up kind of thing.
Q So how long have you been here at Southern Living?
A Somewhere to seven years in July, really going on seven and a half years.
Q Okay. And what did you do before you were here?
A Um, well it's a long story. Before I was here I had just finished up Culinary School in New York at the Culinary School of America. Um, and prior to that, I had another career and changed careers and got into food and so um. That is what I have done for the first quarter of half of my professional life was not related to food magazines.
Q What did you do before then?
A I was in the movie business before.
Q Were you really? That's kind of cool. So were you living in the south then or…?
A I was living in Los Angeles.
Q California?
A Ugh huh.
Q Awesome. That is quite a tip.
A Yeah, oh yeah. It's now what would I do. It's wonderful to be able to write and talk about food.
Q Well, thank you very much. Is there anything else that I'm missing? Or that you think this is what Southern is really about?
A No. If you really pointed at Southern Seasonal Services, those three S's that is really it. And simplicity is like my fourth S, but it's not official. Um, but that is um

that's usually a pretty good one. But if you could stick to those three S's, that's really what defines Southern Living. Yep, I think our editor would agree in some way too.
Q Okay.
A Yeah. Is that good?
Q Yeah. Great. Thank you so much.

Executive Editor, Homes and Gardens

Q For getting at the idea of southernism in the magazine, do you consider yourself a southerner?
A I do.
Q Yes and where are you from?
A Charleston, West Virginia.
Q Charleston, West Virginia? Okay.
A Spent many years in Virginia. I guess Virginia is considered southern state, so.
Q Okay. So do West Virginians consider themselves southerners? Or?
A Depends on where you're from in the state, the whole way the state was created as in the Civil War, they really didn't have allegiances one way or the other to the south or to the north, but if you go midway throughout we all consider ourselves southerners. I'm from that state and from the mid state north, you're getting up to Pittsburg and Pennsylvania, so they're more northern, so it is kind of a divided state.
Q Okay.
A But I've spent many years in school and college and went to high school in Virginia, so.
Q Now, in this area I noticed something similar. It's kind of the divided state.
A Right. That state was divided I guess too and it just depends on where your slate is…
Q Okay. Well, that makes sense. So how do you think…I know Southern Living includes West Virginia and Delaware, all of the areas including Oklahoma. I really never thought of Oklahoma as a southern area. How do you think that makes a dent with the idea of the whole magazine kind of deciding…?
A Well, I think the magazine defines southern perhaps not all southerners. But on a write style a people who have similar values, similar interests, and a similar taste, I think it was defined kind of as Oklahoma, Florida, Texas, up to Delaware over across and part of Missouri. And even the southern part of West Virginia could run into that as well. But I think it has grown beyond that in the few forty years we've been around becoming a lifestyle of some of the same people who have the same qualities, some of the same interests, some of the same desires in life you know. Comfortable, casual, a large garden audience, in fact, it's interesting; we were talking about our garden readers a couple days ago, when it comes to an advertising page, gardening is not a reason to do this magazine. But when it comes to a reader base, readers love gardening. Wherever you go in the south, I don't think it's really said in the Midwest and other parts of the country. But the south has a huge gardening community, so that needs to be a part of this magazine. And

so again, lifestyle: what people are doing, what people are eating, what people are talking about, where people are traveling, that kind of I think compels this region.
Q Okay. So it's definitely more about a southern lifestyle here in Mississippi than any other region?
A Right, in fact, um certainly we wouldn't do a story on southern California, but I spent some time last January (CID)…and I have been a reader for 24 years and I said, "Well, are you from the south?" ,"No," "Have you grown up in the south," "No," "Is your husband from the south?" "No," it turned out that she just loved the places and the people, the gardens, the homes, the food of the south and takes our magazine out to Los Angeles.
Q Wow.
A And so, I guess that kind of encompases the lifestyle a little bit differently than some of these other states. But we always look to those states as a reference point. We're not going to do an editorial piece on Los Angeles, we're going to do it on what we know best and that's the south.
Q Okay. So the southern states points forth (CID).
A Right. Right. People can pick up what they want from it wherever they live.
Q Okay. Well, that sounds good. When you're looking at doing a story, do you stop and say, "Is this southern enough?", or is it more "Yeah I think our readers will be interested in that." Or is it our readers would be interested in that because it's southern, or what kind of turns that on?
A Um my two areas of responsibility are Homes and Gardens and so, well…its kind of hard to answer that because the two sides are so different. Gardens are probably going to be a southern thing because of our climate, our region, and the plants we grow, the types of gardens we are attracted to. Like a southern garden does not look like a western garden. So I think we very much look at the southernism when it comes to gardening, and will the plants be applicable to our southern region. And I think we never lose that core audience. I mean we never want to try to do something out of Arizona and try to appeal it to a southerner either. They can't grow the same plants; our readers can't do the same things like in the west. Now there might be things, for example, the variety to the west is like low garden types. And so were looking to see how perhaps more area waters in the south. Or even in a climate like Birmingham, or southern Missouri, or West Virginia how the native plants can help you save water. And so were looking at the broader picture to bring it home to how that can apply to someone in our region.
Q Okay.
A Now, homes we want to have the southerness. We always ask what the story, the people are and what they did to the house. We never want to look back in antebellum history (CID) so, homes are little more difficult to answer because…yeah, were looking both at the southerness of it. Is it a story about the people who live there and is it the third generation? Is it a story about the style of architecture? Is it a story about comfort and style, which we know our readers love. But we also look a little bit at, and have to; do we think our readers are going to like that? And then if we just get a stunning story come across our desk, and it doesn't have a southern angle or it doesn't have an idea – we're very much on ideas and trying to help our readers get ideas from our homes—that

we'll pass on it because you know when it comes to sitting down and writing a story, if you don't have a hook or an angle to talk to your reader then and when our region is focused on being southern then sometimes we'll pass on it to go to the next story. And so, in the Homes the southerness is a little harder to find, but we still as editors, part of our job is to define what we feel or look to what we feel our readers are going to respond to. So it might not be the antebellum home in Santa Frances, Louisiana, but it might be a new home in Dallas, Texas. But if it's still the good idea and the casual, comfortable style and sign for our readership, then we will take a chance and photograph that. The southerness would come through in the fact that, not the fact that it has grand and glory southern traditional story. Southerness is very hard to talk about when you picture—I don't know, New York City could have the same look and feel as Georgia so we have to look down below the surface and figure out if it fits our (CID).

Q One of the things I've noticed this year in my content of my analysis is I maybe can count like a couple of times where you haven't said this home was located in this place.

A Homes is very much about a sense of place in being in the south. Um, its hard to say, but you gave me two houses to look at of good design, and didn't tell me where they were, it would be hard to determine without seeing the people that live there, without seeing the landscape around the house, without seeing the style of the architecture, sometimes its hard to discern whether this is in the south or its not.

Q Okay.

A Or visa versa. Do you see where I am coming from? So we look at the people and the place and for example, a story we did last February was on a home owner who just gutted and renovated their kitchen and used sub-zero waffle appliances coming from Minnesota or somewhere, or where the company stays and so the products and the colors they picked weren't specifically southern but then over the table they had a chandelier hanging that, I believe was the wife's grandparents home and it was the only thing that survived the Galveston's hurricane in the 1920's, 1930's, somewhere around there.

Q Oh wow.

A And so that had a little bit of southerness to it. Or for example, we have a story that we hope to run next summer on the legend of Hatton blue that a lot of southerners use on their roof and on the front door of their homes. And there is a little bit of a story there that goes along with the Gullah culture which is the culture that African Americans used along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and they used that color as a way to ward off evil spirits. And that just kind permeated southern culture. And now everyone paints their wood, so we will do stories like that. But then we might do a kitchen that's just a beautiful kitchen full of great ideas. And we have to better make a decision, "Does this feel like it belongs in this part of the package?"

Q Okay.

A And the house will be in the south because were not going to go to Illinois and shoot the house. It will be in one of our states so.

Q Right, okay. So in all the stories the location makes it southern?

A Yes.

Q But then you also have to have the other aspects?
A Yeah. You have to have the lantern, or the picture of the kids on the wall or the colors might just be very much rich pallets of the satin interior because the outdoor living is a very big key component in the south too because in our climate-- now, in most of the south except when you get up into the upper south you can't do it—but most of our climates, say from Charlotte southward, you can almost live out on the porch ten months out of the year. And so you can sit out on the chair and read the paper, or we've actually seen several people who have had outdoor fireplaces where they turn the portion to 12 months on the porch out of year. So when you look at the interiors of the home you evaluate the colors or light windows, big bold because we still have the facility to have wonderful homes on beautiful pieces of land. I do work for a southern magazine but you can't go to an apartment window in New York City and look out of that window into another window. And here you can look out of a window into a landscape so, those are all things we think about when we evaluate a home.
Q Okay.
A Gardeners, there are great things about the gardening in the garden culture in the south that whether it be plants or people, landscape divides or hard scrape or the tidy fact of the south.
Q Okay. Do you still like (CID)?
A Yep, yep, I do.
Q Okay.
A Well, you know it's funny while your thinking about it. We did a magazine for several years called "Favorite", you ought to go back and look at some of the issues. It came out between April and May and it was one of my favorites. It's kind of funny. The first year we did it, "Foods" had the "Favorite Foods in the South". "Gardens" had the "Favorite Gardens in the South". "Travel" had the "Best Destinations in the South". There wasn't a favorite home in the south. We don't get into the business to go to Montello or Mount Vernon, we want to look forward and so (CID) the rooms we live in. The kitchen, one of our favorite rooms, um, the outdoor living spaces, our favorite outdoor living spaces, our favorite ideas. So homes took a little bit a broader approach because it was a lot more difficult because home is such a personal position. It's very hard to say our favorite southern factor. Or say the southern paints…now we did pick some paints up like historical references and how to use them. But for the other three departments like food, travel, and gardens we were able to see azaleas, crepe myrtles, favorite southern plants, food you go across the border favorite restaurants in the south, favorite restaurants in New Orleans, um Charleston—favorite destinations in Charleston. And so homes was a little more challenging to define that southern draw, and so it was going back to the people. It was going back to the iconic piece that they kept from their grandparent's home that had been torn down 50 years before and stuff like that.
Q So how would you say as a whole that the magazine and stuff goes about designing the idea of southerness? It is something that is different from inspection or is there terms of over all concepts of the ideas?
A Um, I think it has to be an overall concept of harder working magazine staff. And part of the reason why I think we are a staff-based magazine is because I think that is

very important part of the equation. We have both staff photographers and staff writers; where a lot of magazines out there, especially national magazines are more made up of a freelance space. Working here you get somewhat trained to think what's southern about it. And it enables us to have this sense to what makes it southern. It's hard and intangible quality, but when a good home editor looks at the house and they go, "You know what, this is comfortable. This feels like it belongs to Southern Living." When a garden writer sees a garden and they go, "You know what this has got a great story to it. I got to whether the people or the place or the plant. I got to do the same home whether it's the people the place or the furnishing. Travel is an intangible quality of just knowing nowhere else in the South. I've traveled the South far and wide, a lot of times with our Chief Editor or with just a group of folks or a lot of times by myself, you know you just stumble up on the "World's Largest Rocking Chair" in Rural Texas. It's this giant rocking chair in front of what used to be an old country store with all sorts of Texas stuff. Only in Texas would you find something like that. You wouldn't find that rolling down the road some place else. We just got back from Greenville, South Carolina, and a guy comes and fixes me up for a meeting (CID) , where it looks like it came out of Mash. He bought it from a guy in (CID) South Carolina, who was a tow truck operator (CID) window. There's intangible quality here relates you back to the south. And I think part of the success of this magazine is based on either people who have worked here and know those qualities, or who are still on staff and work and understand those qualities and bring those to the magazine each year. Any national magazine could go into Atlanta and do a story, but what we've got that they don't have is someone probably lived in Atlanta. I used to live in Atlanta. Or someone who lived in Dallas; my wife lived and was from Dallas. And we can get beyond the cursory, you know in Birmingham at House Bar and Grill; you got to eat a potato. (CID) Have you ever tried in Charleston, West Virginia, its not down own, but go to the Bridge Bistro. The chef used to be the sous chef at the Green Briar. Those are the intangible qualities that we can bring to our readership and that's, I guess, is intangible is the right way to say it.

Q Okay. That makes a lot of sense. One thing I did notice—like I'm from Mississippi.

A Right.

Q …And so when I read articles about Mississippi in national magazines, no matter what the article is about, they always mention the civil rights movement.

A Right.

Q But when I read articles about Mississippi in Southern Living, they just talk about whatever the article is about.

A Right, right.

Q I mean is that something that kind of gets the national stereotype?

A Yeah. (CID) and when we were founded in 1966, the South was not getting a lot of breath. And I think the mission from the outset was to show the South five (CID) to reflect the good life of the South. And so, I used to have the (CID) of Houston and it had the craft executives cooking at home. It had some of the same types of stories we do today but it was done in a very different way. But it was to reflect the real life of the south not what the national stereotype of the south, that were all pickup truck–driving,

shotgun-carrying, there's that element everywhere you go in the country and so what I think I like to do here is I don't want us to dwell on the past. Sure you got to know where you came from, but you don't need to do every story in Jackson, Mississippi or Selma, Alabama or Montgomery, Alabama, or Atlanta, Georgia where we mentioned the Civil Rights aspect or the Civil Rights Movement. There are stories that need to do that, there are stories that need to talk about the new Rosa Park's children's exhibit in Montgomery, or the Indian culture in Oklahoma, or the old home in Virginia. But we need to be looking forward when we do that. We need to be looking to the South, you know, I think 40 percent of the South is no longer native southern.

Q Really?

A And I've always said that's a rough number. And I think part of our mission has to be to entertain and perform and transform information all over the country to foreign cities, and looking at how we live today or how we lived in the 1950s or 1960 or 1850 or 1840, you know, there is that element anywhere you go. Especially in Mississippi, I mean you can go to Mississippi and you still have some folks who think they're living in Antebellum south, but that's not the way we need to do a magazine. We need to do a magazine that embraces where we are today and where we're going tomorrow. Civil Rights Movement, the good and the bad are all in that, but you don't dwell on that. You're right, when you read a national magazine, you always have to drag out something that talks about an aspect of our past and really we ought to be looking beyond and figuring out how we can make it better.

Q Okay. One more question – Would you say that the magazine gets most of its inspiration from the readership, or would you say it kind of takes a leadership role in guiding the magazine?

A Both. We're never about trends; if we're ever about trends then I need to go find another job—good comfortable life, good comfortable lifestyle and you know for example, what really gets me is we get calls from planners in New York or Los Angeles or Chicago or San Francisco and they want to know what the Southern Living hot (CID) are for the season. And you know, it's a lot easier to change your shirt than it is to change your walk out. And so we have to teach and educate our readers how to live a comfortable life that makes them happy. A quality life that is healthy and focused and gives them the things they want and disregards the things they don't want. With a large readership that we have, we have a lot of leeway in what we can't cover and don't cover, but I think a good portion, well let me start over, we get a good number of readers every year.

Q Okay.

A In fact, probably thousands of readers a year, but not all of them make a good story. In fact there is a few of them that make a good story and one of them sticks out in mind is a readership middle who comes in that came in a couple of years ago from North Carolina, they were the third generation of this family that lived on this farm. And the house is beautiful, the gardens are beautiful, the story they had to tell was beautiful. And so we picked that out and did a story on it. The homeowners, who have the garden, that just has a few plants in it and sent it to us, were not often interested. But there is a really neat story as to why those plants are there. So it's a balance, I love everything that comes

into readership because it's easier on the budget. But we get out there. We also feel prized to have a staff that is professional, whether it is culinary professionals, or garden landscape professionals, or architectural interior design on our staff. We also want to lead a little bit too, you know we don't want a burgundy and navy blue are 1989, you know we get some of those from middles. It's not necessarily exactly where we feel design needs to go so, were leading but were also responding to the readers too who have great stories to tell. So it's kind of a combination of both. And that again, is through having a group of experts and a group of folks that understand the magazine and make a difference in a lot of what would be a national magazine. And if we lose that voice and we lose that tone and we lose that expert knowledge of our region, and then we will just become a diluted version of what a lot of other people put in their magazines. It does throw me sometimes when I read about a house in the south that they have no knowledge of the south in a competitive magazine. And it's like you miss the real point as to why this person has this great porch, or why this person has this beautiful garden, or why this restaurant is so good. You miss the real character and the real personality or the real hook to making that a great story. And that's what we can provide our readers.
Q Is there anything else that you can tell me about Southern Living that I am missing out on? Or is there anymore importance to it?
A Um, not that I can think of. Probably just ramble too long with my voice on this thing. But no, um, I do think that one of the most important things that we have is that we are a largely staff-based magazine, so we're able to cover the South in a very different way than perhaps some freelancer who flies in to cover it would. And I think that's important to whether it's southern, or western (CID) a larger staff than a lot of magazines. Um, whether it's southerness, westerners, or cottages, whatever your topic is. Although I think the trend with freelance with photography is something magazine too. I think having a core staff of people who understand the mission of the magazine is very important for keeping that mission or whatever that is. Otherwise, you will end up all over the place.
Q Okay.

Travel Editor

Q. Okay. Well, first thing's first. Let me give you this oral (CID) as required by the (CID) board (CID). That just kind of verifies to you the purpose of my thesis –

A. Super.

Q. Which is, it's called "Defining the Southern in Southern Living."

A. Okay.

Q. I was looking at regional magazines while I was at (CID) and, you know, kind of how they handle their different regions, and so I wanted to see—well, I mean, when you're looking at regional magazines, Southern Living's, like, the top.

A. The big regional magazine.

Q. Right.

A. Yeah.

Q. So see how it handles defining its region and kind of how that might apply.

A. Okay.

Q. (CID) so it's going to be me in my thesis (CID) library books and being published. (CID)

A. Great.

Q. That's the main point of that

A. This is a non-confidential interview. Is that what you said?

Q. Yes.

A. Okay. So I won't say anything –

Q. So don't say anything too embarrassing.

A. Right.

Q. Okay. Awesome. Okay. Kind of the purpose of this is to look and see, I guess, the (CID) how you decide what stories you're going to put into the magazine and what you think makes the magazine particularly southern?

A. Who all have you interviewed so far? And that way – I don't want to keep giving you the same –

Q. I've interviewed, so far, [name editors].

A. Okay.

Q. And you're interview number four.

A. Okay. Are you going to talk to [editor]?

Q. Yes, I am. I am.

A. Good. So I am sure that everyone, so far, has told you about the four S's?

Q. The four S's?

A. The four S's.

Q. (CID)

A. Wow! Some people think there's just three.

Q. Oh, then I definitely –

A. Let me see if I can remember them, first of all. I might can only come up with three: seasonality, of course, southernness, service, and I've forgotten the fourth "S," but we do have a fourth one here.

Q. Yeah, I knew the first three. I was counting on you to –

A. We had three. Now there's a fourth. Let me keep thinking about it. That might be confidential. No, I'm kidding. Um, I'll come up with it later. So you want to know what makes something southern?

Q. What makes something southern? Like, how do you define southern? Is it just a geographical thing – "Okay. We cover these states and so –"

A. Well, that's the easiest way.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. And to be honest we cheat that a lot. I think that there's an esoteric way of looking at this South and southernness and there are some things that are distinctly southern. The South is the only region of the United States that really has a distinct culture and a unique identity. And so you can play to that depending on what region you're talking about. Because, like anything else, it is fairly subjective. And what I mean by that is people in – just take barbeque, for instance. Has anyone else talked to you about barbeque?

Q. Not specifically.

A. Okay. Barbeque is a great way to look at the South. When a culture moves, and I'm just talking about any culture – I'm the travel editor, so I've gotten to travel a good bit – and when you see, say, first generation immigrants, they've moved to this country from Italy. They speak Italian. They may not speak English. Their children, however, speak English, may not speak Italian.

Q. Right.

A. So they'll lose their language. They'll lose their distinct code of dress. They might give up their religion. They might go from Catholicism to being Protestant. They'll give up their educational traditions. They'll give up the kind of housing they live in, but the one thing that they will not give up, the one thing that transcends, generation after generation, is food. Food has a remarkable staying power in someone's palate. So if you want to study "What is southern," the best way to do that is to look at the food.

Because some things change – preferences and way of talking and a whole thesis has been written on the twang of the Appalachians but it's infinite. But the one thing that really, if you're painting with a broad brush, that you can talk about in the South is food. And different parts of the South, especially when you're talking about barbeque, have different ideas of what a barbeque is. But in a broad stroke southerners consider barbeque a noun and not a verb. So in the North, you know, "We're going to have a barbeque," or "We're going to barbeque this weekend." They mean weenies and hamburgers by that.

Q. I was so disappointed –

A. It's so wrong!

Q. (CID)

A. And you can go from El Paso, which is the furthest west point that we cover, but you can go from El Paso all the way up to Delaware , and I would hope that there's some people in Delaware that know what barbeque is and have a distinct idea of what barbeque is supposed to be. Now, we all don't agree, certainly do not agree, about what barbeque is supposed to be. Because, after all, in North Carolina they will put slaw on your barbeque. Slaw is a side. It's not supposed to be in barbeque. Here in Alabama we invented white sauce. A lot of people would say that white sauce is not sauce unless it's red. Okay. Sauce is not sauce unless it's red. Out in Texas barbeque is beef. Kansas City they're barbequing chicken. But there is something that connects all southerners in that food thought. And so I think that is probably why in our magazine food is the most popular section with our readers. We survey our readers like Neilson does television. I'm sure you've seen – that's highly confidential information, so I won't talk about the scores specifically, but we do know what our readers like from month to month and what they respond to and they really respond to food. They love the recipes and they love the food. And I think that goes back to – the South may evolved and southern may evolve and if you asked fifty years ago what southern is, I think you'd get a really vastly different answer than you get today.

Q. Okay.

A. But food, kind of, is a constant – we see that a lot in travel because in the part of the magazine we have a little more breadth in diversity and what we talk about than, say, the gardens or the food department, I mean, they're always writing about what's for dinner.

Q. Right.

A. Or how to dig a hole and put a green thing in it. And we can write about food. We can write about gardening. We can write about homes, home tours. We write about culture all over the South. We go to most of the South sporting events. We go to most of the South cultural events, and those have gradually changed over time and what people

are interested in and what resonates with them.

Q. How long have you been at the magazine?

A. I've been here 7 years.

Q. 7 years? Okay. Have you seen in shift in that time? Or is it kind of historically (CID)?

A. Not a major shift. If you go back and you look at what we covered 40 years ago, you wonder – by today's standards you would think, "This just wouldn't sell." It would not work today. Southerners today are more sophisticated, more sophisticated in their tastes and the way they decorate their home, and I think they're, um – I'm the food critic too – so I think they're food palate has changed. You know, like all Americans, they have been greatly influenced by the culinary trends of this country, so let's take coffee. Ten years ago in the South, you really could not find a good cup of coffee. No one knew what an espresso was. It wouldn't have occurred to anyone to order a latte at McDonalds. McDonalds really, probably had the best coffee around the South, unless you went to a really nice hotel somewhere, and you might find some sort of cappuccino machine gathering dust in a corner somewhere. But Starbucks, regardless whether you think it's Starbucks, has totally changed the coffee palate of southerners, because now you can pretty much get a good cup of coffee in any moderate size city in the South. I mean Montgomery has good coffee now, and that is a tiny, tiny town. And you can get an espresso. You can get an Italian-based coffee experience now in Montgomery, Alabama or Greenville or Jackson, Mississippi. And so that's really – when I say that I think tastes have become more sophisticated, they certainly have become more global.

Q. How do you see the role of Southern Living in kind of either directing or following the trends in the South? Like, do you see it kind of setting, like, a step ahead to kind of rear people, "this is the direction we're going." Or do you see it more looking at where the readers are and responding to that?

A. I think we mostly respond to the reader. I mean, we have taken leadership different things, but the stories have been few and far between. You know, I worked in news before I worked here, so I will say that, that, kind of, prejudices me a little towards the entertainment side of the magazine and talking about Southern Living as an entertainment magazine. It's not a news magazine, and I say that to new interns here a lot, because it's important when you are starting a career to know very distinctly what you're getting into. So magazines, by nature of their frequency don't, just cannot compete in any kind of news sense, any real news sense, in the sense that news is new.

Q. Right.

A. Because by the time we get it out, it's old, and it's generally a year old. We work a year in advance here at Southern Living. And I think leadership, well leadership we can offer, comes in sort of an analysis. My last job was at Forbes.

Q. Oh, Okay.

A. So at Forbes, working at Forbes, there was no way we could break financial news. I mean, we did every now and then just by being dumb luck or just—I shouldn't have said that – we broke it every now and then because we had a reporter who had covered an industry for a long time and they could find out something that maybe other people weren't initially interested in but then once it broke then it became a sensation, so every now and then we would break news. But by and large our mission was not to do that. The Wallstreet Journal, Daily is news. Forbes, because it was biweekly was more analysis of the news. So we had that luxury of the two weeks or month or however long it was to step back and say, "Okay. This is a trend. This is what's happening. " And so in a sense Southern Living is sort of the same way. We just don't break news, but we respond to the marketplace, because our purpose, really, is to entertain our readers. And that's not something that I'm at all ashamed of. I think I'm very, very proud of what we do. A lot of people ask me, "Why would you want to leave a real news organization—" even though I didn't think Forbes was breaking a lot of news – "Why would you want to leave real journalism to go to a fluff magazine that published foods, homes, travel, and gardens and what in the world would lead you to do that?" Well the fluff magazine that's covered those things has about ten times as circulation of Forbes, so the financial guys I, kind of, flippantly said, "Well, when you have 20 million readers, give me a call." But honestly, the longer I've been here, the more I'm offended by that question. But if you want to talk about leadership, in an individual article, probably not. I mean, we've done some remarkable stories this year, I think, that actually weren't that popular with the readers, but any time we run an article that -- I think is important, is well-written, is beautifully photographed, so it's not that it was poorly researched or poorly photographed that lead it to be unpopular -- but any time we see a story sort of dip in the readership poll that's what I call – I call that a leadership story because it may be a bit before someone – before it becomes popular enough for people to really respond to it in a positive way. You may just get a minority of people that would want to do it. I mean, it's like thirty years ago we talked about Disney as being a great place to go before it was what it is today. So obviously that story would not have scored as well when Disney first opened as it would today that people are more familiar with it, and that's another really broad example. But one story we did this year was the story on the Indians in Oklahoma on – I can't remember the name of the reservation. You'd have to look for it to find it. (CID) did a story that I just adore on sacred harp singing which is also called fasola singing. How is that a leadership story? Well, it's about – it's really almost a preservation story because it's the end of a musical era that she's writing about. Fasola singing is just singing without – you just sing the notes.

Q. I love sacred harp.

A. It's cool, but not many people love sacred harp. Not many people under thirty know what sacred harp singing is, so we felt like, yes, a lot of our older readers will know what it is, but it's a leadership sort of story to our younger readers so that, that won't die out. But in a broader sense about leadership, since we're not breaking news, what are we

doing here that could be interpreted in a positive way? For me, we write about things that mean the most to people. No one sits on their death beds and says, "Oh, well, I wish I had spent more times in meetings and at the office." People spend time on their, I guess, reflecting their life and they think about those holidays they spent with their families, the beautiful garden they created out of a dull backyard, the home that they raised their children in and how beautiful it was, and the vacations they spent with their family. We teach people how to make their home life better, how to make the meals they prepare for their family healthier. And in the travel department, specifically to me, we deal with what people value the most, more than anything else, and that's their free time. And that's an awesome responsibility to have, because travel is expensive, really expensive. To take a family of four to Disney now is going to set you back at least five thousand dollars if you go for anything more than a weekend. So that's a great deal of trust that our readers put in us, and they do believe us, more than any other magazine I've ever worked for. If Southern Living tells them to go somewhere, they go. They really go. They spend that money. But those magazines over my shoulder back here -- Travel and Leisure, (CID) Traveler, and National Geographic Traveler – are very pretty. They're pretty. But no one is going to go to any of the places that they write about. I mean, it's a minute percentage of their readership is actually going to take their advice and go there. It's armchair travel.

Q. So do you think the travel section, (CID) in some ways it's like "Oh, that would be a cool place to go." In other ways, I see people reading it and saying, " Oh, I've been there," or, "that's in my state that I'm already familiar with," and it's like they connect more with the magazine?

A. That's a duality of Southern Living. On one side, Southern Living's purpose is to be very service-oriented and do those things that I was talking about earlier that makes someone's life better. They value us for the service we bring. So I'll give you a travel story that is an example of a heavy service travel story. Readers don't want to know that the Ritz Carlton is a nice place to stay. They know that. They don't have to pay Southern Living $36 a year to tell them that. So, duh. And they don't want to know that a Holiday Inn is a cheap place to stay. They know that too. So we do absolutely no service by telling them that they can save a nickel by staying at the Hampton Inn. What readers really want to know is, "How can I stay at the Ritz Carlton for the price of the Hampton Inn?" Now, if we can tell them that, then suddenly we're really worth $36 a month. So [writer], I told her to go do that about two years ago. She looked at me kind-of funny, but when she found it in the March issue, where we're coming out with ten hotels under $100, and the lead hotel in that is the Four Seasons. Four Seasons is offering a package of under 100 bucks a night to Southern Living readers, and to anyone else who happened to read it and find out about it, of course. It's night an advertising related deal. It is purely an editorial sponsor story. But that's a great example of a service piece that, I think, readers will really open up and say, "Oh, my gosh! This is great!" Because we've spread them all across our entire geographic territory, so there will be a hotel within 3 or 4 hours of most of our readers. And that's something that only, I think only Southern

Living is doing. And I read all of the competitive travel set and don't see that kind of thing. On the other side, though, we, Southern Living, is meant to entertain, and entertainment can take on a number of different forms. I mean, the story can be beautiful and it can be funny. It can be about a favorite subject. A lot of times I find, in particular with this magazine, a distinct form of entertainment, and that is pride in the South. The very foundation of Southern Living – we came out in the 60s, which is not a particularly good time to be a southerner, especially here in Birmingham. '68 was probably the darkest year in this country's history, and that really was the very beginning of the early days of this magazine. What Southern Living did was celebrate the South and preserve the positive aspects of the South and really put them out there as worthy to rebound, worthy to be proud of, and that doesn't sound very radical, but it still holds true today. See, magazines that I've worked for in New York think that the United States ends at the Hudson River, and so if they're going to talk about the beach, they're going to talk about the Hamptons, and if they're going to talk about the mountains, they're going to talk about the Adirondacks. But the average person in Tennessee or South Carolina has no idea what the Hamptons are. They don't know what the Jitney is. They don't know or care what a camp in the Adirondacks means. They just don't have any interest in that, because it doesn't affect them in any way. And still today, Town and Country, Harper's Bizarre, those magazines back there, Traditional Homes, all, pretty much, talk about either the Northeast, California, Coastal Florida, or every now and then they'll throw us a bone and cover Atlanta. But they do a very poor job of covering anything beyond what's right in front of them. And those magazines tend to be written, not for their readers – I know this sounds ironic – but they're written for their colleagues. They're written for their other editors in town, so they can move over and get a better job somewhere else. My first promotion in magazines came in Vanity Fair. When I put – this will date me – but I put a caption on a picture of Monica Lewinsky. We were the first magazine to photograph Monica Lewinsky after the affair, and I wrote the caption, " The face that launched a thousand subpoenas." And that was, with (CID), esoteric, and I was very proud of it. And probably, since Vanity Fair's readership, like most magazine's readership, are probably reading on a fifth or sixth grade level, went over the head of most of our readers, but the other editors thought that it was very funny, and I got a promotion over of that. That'd be a horrible caption here at Southern Living. If you read our headlines, they're really not very clever, but they're ingenious in what they do. Because the headline's meant to entice readers to get into the story, and they do that incredibly well. But because readers don't spend more than one or two seconds on a headline, if you make them esoteric, and you've got to think about what that means – is there a joke in there somewhere – you lose that reader. So we're very deliberate in making it – and that goes back to, I guess, the service piece that I was talking about. But, that said, distinction between Southern Living – so back to your question, "What makes it Southern?" I guess there's two questions there that I'm addressing is, "What makes it southern?" And also, "What makes it a good, well-read magazine?"

Q. Right.

A. And those two at least converge here.

Q. So you came to Southern Living seven years ago?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. And how long had you been in New York before then?

A. Since I got out of college in ’94. So I joined – I had been in New York – well, I had kind of been in New York before I graduated, sort of like you are here now, so I’ve been in New York , I think, seven years.

Q. Okay. Are you a southerner?

A. Uh-huh. Born here in Birmingham. 8th generation (CID.)

Q. My goodness.

A. Yes, very proud of that. My wife was a New Yorker, called me the Alabama ambassador in New York.

Q. Really?

A. Yeah, because I felt that it was my duty to tell about how great the South was and how fantastic our culture is, and it is. It is very separate and distinct from New York.

Q. I have one question for you. One thing I noticed whenever I read stories in national magazines – and I’m from Mississippi – they refer to Mississippi, like, no matter what the stories about, they always say, “ (CID) which was in decided in 19-whatever. So-and-so died.” You know, no matter what happens (CID)—

A. Sure. And Birmingham has the same issues, the fire hoses, the dogs.

Q. Right. And so, I mean, Southern Living doesn’t do that. I mean when you’re talking about a story, you know, a Civil Rights Museum opened up and you talk about that (CID), like how do you go about handling –

A. The race issue in the South?

Q. The race issues, the history that went into play. I don’t know. Southerners have seen places where they live, where their grandparents lived and not necessarily, strictly, in terms of –

A. Well, we don’t ignore it. That’s the first thing. We don’t ignore it.

Q. Right. How do you, kind of, balance that?

A. We are very, very deliberate here about trying to put diversity in the magazine, so that’s something I look for when we’re going through the pictures. Do we have black

faces in our magazine? And not just the help. That sounds harsh, and I don't mean it to sound harsh. But a lot of times when you go to look through the pictures for any particular month, sometimes the only minority faces you'll see are the hotel maid or the hotel waiter, and I believe – this is not based on any research – but I believe if you're looking through a magazine and you don't see any people who look like you, whether you're a woman or you're young or you're old or you're black or white or whatever, that you will internalize that and say, "That magazine is not for me. That magazine is written for, you know, rich, white people from Greenwich, Connecticut. I think that when I look through Town and Country. So I deliberately try to make sure there are people in our magazine, a lot of diversity in our magazine—diversity of age, diversity of ethnicity, diversity of gender. So that we don't unintentionally exclude people based on that totally unscientific theory of mine. We cover the history of the South. We don't talk a lot about history at Southern Living because it's not a huge interest of our readers. They're interested in today. How do I make my meal tonight better? How do I make my garden grow next spring better? How do I plan my next vacation? So they're really not that interested in history, but when we do talk about the racial tensions in Birmingham and Mississippi, we're really proud of those moments in our history. A lot of southerners are very sheepish about what happened here. And I have lived a lot of other places and worked with a lot of other people from all kinds – I married a southern impaired person, my wife, from New York. And I can tell you that racism is everywhere. It is pervasive in our culture, and the worst racist jokes I've ever heard in my life were in New York City from, not just Joe Blow on the street – some rednecks you might expect to tell you a racist joke in the South – but from the CEO of the world's largest advertising company, took me aside and said, "You're from Alabama. You'll love this joke." And told me a real ear-burner, which I would never repeat. But just last week, Cramer, out in Los Angeles, had a total meltdown on stage. And, had that been in Jackson, Mississippi or Birmingham, Alabama, can you imagine how the national media would have descended? But as a southerner – and I've lived in other places and gone to other places – and I see that racism is everywhere. And the South has wised up in many ways in the '60s. It was bad here. It was bad here. And it was probably worse here than it was in a lot of other places because it was institutionalized. And, particularly here in Birmingham, we had (CID), one of the most evil men to have ever sucked a breath. But the people in Birmingham, the African-Americans in Birmingham, had the bravery and the courage to face down Jim Crow. And that really is what that history means to me. When I look at those fire hoses and I look at the dogs, I think how incredibly brave they were and what a tremendous amount of courage it took, when no one else in the country was fighting racism, and when you could get killed for fighting racism, that they stood up and did that. So when we cover that today in Southern Living, we try to show that heroism, because to me, it is true heroism. And, yes, the institutionalized racism in the South that existed prior to the Civil Rights Movement is certainly a very dark, dark spot on our history. But in many ways, the whites and blacks alike who fought it are a tone for much of that in their courage. And that's what we write about.

Q. Okay.

A. (CID)

Q. Yes.

A. So it's not something I'm ashamed of. I don't think my colleagues here are ashamed of it. We write about it at least once a year. There's a new civil rights trail, a new museum opening up on a regular basis around the South, and so we cover that and we're proud of it.

Q. One more question. Where do you get your ideas for your story. I know in the food section they said they got, like, seventy percent of the recipes from readers. Do you get suggestions in from readers?

A. We get lots and lots – yeah, we do. We get tons of suggestions from readers. We really, um – we're so different. We don't use freelancers, and that's a big key to our success.

Q. Okay.

A. Because you cannot develop trust with – between a reader and a sporadic writer. They might not know – I'm talking about the readers . They might not know [writer's] name. They might not know [writer's] name, but they develop a (CID) with writers here, subconsciously, and some consciously. I mean, everybody knows (CID) in the magazine, but um, they develop a (CID) with that writer and trust that writer, particularly because those writers cover their states, month after moth. So if you were a writer on the staff, you would be given a geographical area to cover, month after month after month. So you're based in Birmingham, but let's say you're writing about Georgia and South Carolina. You come to know Georgia and South Carolina like a native.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And you also have the benefit of working here at Southern Living everyday and knowing what our priorities are and how we want to respond to the reader. So you're not like some freelancer that pops out, does one story for us, and we edit it to fit, and then you're never heard of again. You did Charleston, just because you happen to live in Charleston and you know Charleston well. That works for most of those magazines. They've got somebody who knows the Caribbean. They've got somebody who lives in France, and it's a lot cheaper to hire someone who lives in France and befriend someone who lives in France to cover (CID) or whatever. But we do things the expensive way. We send our writers out to all the far corners of the South on our nickel and then fly them home, because we believe that develops a very close (CID) with their sources and many times, their sources are the readers or publicists or shop owners or um, you know, just all the various people they meet on the road. I think if you talk to any writer here they're going to have a huge cross-section of sources. We do listen to publicists. I won't tell you that we don't, because they're good people and they are also good sources many times. But we rarely ever, especially since I got here, would use them as the definitive source.

So we generally use a CVB (Convention and Visitors Bureau) as a starting point and then go behind that with our readers. We post things on the Internet here. We got a group of groupies that follow everything we do and love everything we do, and if you ask them their opinion, my God, you get it. I put my email address in the magazine every month at the bottom of my –

Q. (CID)

A. Oh, boy!

Q. I wondered about that. (CID)

A. You get a lot of responses. But I believe that you've got to make yourself a real person. If you make yourself available to your readers, you're going to get a better product in the end. And we're a very open magazine. Try calling Vanity Fair. Try calling my first job, and just ask to speak to someone in their features department or the author of a story you see and see how easy it is to get through. Give it a whirl. Try it. That'd be good for your thesis. Put a little time clock on it and see how long it takes you and how many "no's" you get. Try that at our competitors. Call up Martha. Call up Better Housekeeping. (CID) Better Homes and Gardens.

Q. (CID)

A. Better Housekeeping. Yeah. That's going to be my new dismissive way to refer to them. No, they're fine people, and they do a good job. They certainly have a ton of readers, but I think we're better.

Q. Of course.

A. I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

Q. Where in the mix of southernness you would say, "This is what you really need to know about the magazine and how we put it together in (CID)?"

A. In the mix of southernness?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. So. Explain that to me.

Q. So when you're putting a magazine together – you know we talked about where your stories come from and service and the southerness and the seasonality and the fourth S. Have you thought of it?

A. You know, I haven't thought of it.

Q. At 2 a.m. (CID)

A. It's going to come to me later. I can't believe – we used to have it all written out, so I've got it here somewhere I'm sure.

Q. Okay.

A. There is a fourth S though.

Q. I've only heard three, so --

A. No, there is a fourth. There's a mysterious fourth "S."

Q. (CID)

A. No, it really doesn't. I'm more concerned making up the book. Do we have what our readers are truly interested in? I want to make sure that we give them, month to month, something that they just say, "Wow! I'd really like to take that." I want to give them a range of different trip options. I want to give them a one-week trip, a two-day trip, a weekend trip, a long weekend trip, a budget trip, a splurge trip, an anniversary trip, a family trip. I mean there's so many different kinds of vacations that we talk about that probably mesmerizes of my planning time that soaks up about half of it. The other forty percent of my planning time is figuring out what subject matter we're going to cover. Do we have too many hotels? Do we have too many restaurants? Do we have too many – because there are only so many topics that one can visit. When you've got to write 35 articles about Arkansas every year, after the first year or so you start saying, "Gosh, we can't go back to Little Rock again. We've got to get out to Hot Springs. We've got to get out to Hope. We've got to get out to –" So that takes a long time. And a lot of times, I guess in making up the southernness of it, that's probably something we – I don't want to say we take it for granted because sometimes if it's in the South, it's southern.

Q. One thing I've noticed in my content analysis to certain – you know, like, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee (CID) in the South.

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. And then when I read articles like in Oklahoma or Kansas City, like one thing I noticed –

A. What's western about it?

Q. When I was doing my content analysis is just using the word "southern" or "southerners" or "southern something" and I hardly ever see that word in Oklahoma or Kansas City or –

A. Well, they don't really consider themselves a southerner, southerners. If they're reading this magazine out there in Delaware – and [editor] might just hit me in the head for saying this -- I don't know if they're reading this magazine because they're – some people read Southern Living because they're proud of the South, they want to preserve

their southern heritage, they want to talk about being – they have that real cultural identity and tie to the South. Others read this magazine because it's a great magazine. It is. It's just phenomenal. And so I would bet you that the percentage of people on those border states, as my grandmother called them, (CID) a little higher. If you ask them, "Why do you read this magazine? Because it's a fantastic magazine? Or because you identify yourself as a southerner?" That they would say, "Because it's a fantastic magazine." It's a higher percentage of subscribers there. That is just a wild guess, all right? And I could substantiate that, probably, by going back through the readership scores and looking at how things scored out in Texas and seeing what – doing just as you did and, "When do we say southerner? When do we say best in the South?" And seeing how that correlated with how those Texas readers felt about that article. Now, Texas, we know, if you put a Texas flag in it or you put, say, Texas in the work, people out there just go nuts over the story, because they have a much stronger cultural affiliation with their state and than they do their region. Good question though. Delaware, same thing.

Q. Yeah. Delaware (CID)

A. We include them because we have a lot of readers there. And if they subscribe to the magazine, we want to cover them. Um, I guess you brought up something that, I guess, could be a threat. If we continued to get just volumes and volumes of readers from other parts of the country – I think there is a natural limit. You know, there is a lot of people in the Midwest – that might be a question to ask [editor] – a lot of people in the Midwest are subscribing. We are getting a lot of people from Illinois, Ohio – we are getting a lot of interesting subscribers

Q. (CID)

A. I don't know. I don't know. Uh, they could be. They could be. I mean, it becomes ridiculous to contemplate it after – I suppose that's the wrong thing to say to the academics – because, you know, how many southerners are really in Florida? Outside of the panhandle?

Q. Yeah.

A. Or Atlanta. Or the research triangle. But that's a truly American thought. You know, you can move to France and not be a Frenchman. You can move to England and not be an Englishman, but you can move to the United States and be an American. And it's the same way in the South. You can move to the South – I just had my in-law's move, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, just move from New York, from Long Island to Birmingham.

Q. Really?

A. Yes. And they have subscribed to Southern Living now, and they consider themselves southerners.

Q. Wow!

A. And they are so proud to be in the South. And they think – they are adopting the manners of the South, the distinct, you know, social code here. They are now getting into the rhythm of that.

Q. (CID) for them is it more of a how-to?

A. I think it's a fact-finding mission. Yeah. They're like, "Okay. So what do we have to do?" You know, when you're new to a city – if you moved to Seattle or you moved to Atlanta – you want to know whether the – what are the social codes of the city? That's just a prime evil directive. I mean, you get a new tribe you figure out what's accepted –

Q. How to fit in.

A. Right, how to fit in. So Southern Living may be fulfilling that for those readers in Florida or those transplants in the research triangle. A lot of people, jokingly, refer to it as the bible of the South. And, aside from being (CID), it's probably true that we do document the food and the culture and the travel. If you travel through a region, you will pretty much learn the most important things that made up the cultural identity of that region, because people will tell you, "You've got to go see – if you go to Vicksburg, you've got to go see the battlefield."

Q. Really?

A. Yeah. You go to Atlanta, you've got to go see the Coca-Cola Museum. (CID) Park. You've got to go do that. So you learn when you go some place what's the most important thing in the (CID) of that region. It works out that way for food too. I know it seems crazy, but when I go around to different towns, different towns all have a food identity, whether they know it or not. I don't think the people in – are you from Jackson?

Q. I am.

A. Okay. Next time you're home in Jackson, go to a restaurant – and I want you to write me and tell me if this still holds true, and I bet it does. People in Jackson are infatuated with lump crabmeat. Did you know that?

Q. I did not know that.

A. Uh-huh. I don't think they know that, but it is on every damn menu in that whole town.

Q. Really?

A. Lump crabmeat. It's everywhere. It's on the steak with lump crabmeat and the filet with lump crabmeat and chicken with lump crabmeat and I wouldn't be surprised if

it was crem brule with lump crabmeat. But every dish, it seemed, in that town had lump crabmeat in it.

Q. That's interesting (CID)

A. That's right. And so I kept thinking – but something in that town triggered it. And the other chef said, "Well, this survived. I've got to have – somebody really liked lump crabmeat in Jackson, and the chef figured if they put it on the menu people would come. And it just – that's how cultural phenomenon begins. And a lot of times people in that town are just not even aware of it. But when you travel a lot, your eyes become open to that kind of thing. And we report on it in Southern Living. And I guess people insight into themselves, and it also gives visitors an insight into our culture that I don't think they would have had otherwise.

Food Editor

Q. And you do the foods? Is that right?

A. I am the foods planning editor. Well, the official title is the foods editor, but in-house title is planning editor.

Q. So what makes the difference between those two?

A. My job is basically to make sure a story happens from start to finish, to make sure we have lineup each month, to make sure those recipes are tested on time on schedule, shot, produced, and written and ready to go.

Q. Okay. So kind of like a managing editor for the food section?

A. Yeah. Some sort of manager of workflow, if you will.

Q. Okay.

A. That's what I do. And I also write stories as well.

Q. Okay, yes. So do most people who are on staff and are editors, also write stories or are there some people who just --

A. Most of the editors do write stories. We do have some recipe editors on staff, who only do that. They're sort of copy editors in the recipe world so they read every recipe that comes through. They have greater attention to detail than most people.

Q. So they're watching for, "Those ingredients don't go together."

A. Exactly. And they're watching to make sure ingredients aren't missing if the test notes jive with the final copy. They're the people who go to the test kitchen to get questions answered on any recipe, and they just make sure that the recipe makes sense,

that the number of ingredients that are listed in the recipe are mentioned in the procedure. Sometimes that gets left out. We're only human. They're sort of our watchdogs when it comes to recipes.

Q. So you do more of the planning of , "You know, we need to have recipes on this many different topics and make sure we have enough desserts and entrees and all that," kind of seeing how the whole thing comes together?

A. Balance is my middle name. I have to make sure that we're not too repetitive. We can't have too much chicken, too much shrimp in one issue. We can't, if it's a small month, we need something for everyone probably but not so narrow topics, more broad topics. But we have monthly planning meetings, and we all together as a group plan each issue and what topics we want to cover and what seasonal – season plays a big role, especially in the South.

Q. I guess when you're looking at all these stories, are you looking for something that's particularly southern in the recipes? Are you looking at, "Oh this is something the readers will like," or, "This is something that the readers sent us."

A. We know what our readers like. A lot of times they inspire us. I don't know if you know this and this is probably getting off your question, but I think what sets us apart first and foremost of any regional magazine is that we are reader-based, especially in the food section. We have files of reader recipes that come in, and we publish about 60 percent of our recipe is our reader.

Q. Okay.

A. So going back to planning, we want to make sure we get those reader recipes in. So a lot of times somebody will bring an idea to the table and say, "You know, I was flipping through the file and I saw so many peach cobbler recipes. I think we should do a story on peach cobbler." So that's kind of how it's inspired.

Q. Okay. That's one of the things I'm looking at in like how the magazine relates to the region, because you could look at Southern Living like, "This is what it means to be southern, so read the magazine, and you could act on it," or, "Okay. These people are southern so we're going to use this stuff in the magazine."

A. And it's both.

Q. Okay.

A. Our editoralways asks, "What's southern about it?" For example, I just went to San Jose, California, and covered a young southern couple who moved from Tennessee to San Jose, and they met friends by entertaining, having them over for dinner parties, and she cooked southern style, southern family recipes, and they all loved it. So we can get outside the South and we have a lot of readership outside of the South. It's just that we cover the largest region. We're the largest regional magazine, and so we do need to

keep it southern in our topics.

Q. So what do you define southern foods? Is there certain things like, "We're not going to do the Thai fish," or how do you do all that?

A. Well, there's (CID) southern. Like we have a (CID) column called "Taste of the South," where we feature an iconic southern food, like turnip greens or how to fry the best chicken. But it's also what our readers are doing and what are food friends in the industry are doing. Whatever is– I don't want to use the word trendy – but what's popular right now. Thai is becoming popular. It kind of scares our readers a little bit, but that won't stop us from covering it because there are a lot of Asian communities within the South. So that's southern.

Q. So would you look for an Asian family, like a Thai family –

A. We could.

Q. -- in Georgia and feature their Thai Thanksgiving?

A. We have before, or we could just do a three-column on these great stir-fry recipes or great Asian flavor or whatever our title is, but we have done that before too.

Q. Okay. So would that be more a trendsetting role, or are your readers sending in the Thai recipes?

A. They are, but not as much. And we also – Asian food in particular doesn't always score as well as the more mainstream types of foods, if you will. Southwestern foods is a homerun. If we run anything with chicken in the title, it's going to score well. Thai is probably not going to score well, but we also are educated with food. We choose are readers. We'll kind of have to take baby steps into what's new to them, what their comfort zone is. We'll have to kind of have to ease into it.

Q. Right. Kind of push the boundaries a little bit but you keep the chicken recipes and Southwestern recipes coming along side the Thai?

A. Exactly. I think almost every issue has to have something Southwestern because Texas is our biggest state, our largest readership, obviously.

Q. Do you consider yourself southern?

A. You know, that's funny. I was not born in the South, but yes, I do consider myself southern. I was a military kid, and I spent the first four years of my life in South Dakota, and then after that it was all Southeast. So I lived in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana –

Q. Oh, wow! (CID)

A. I did. And I've enjoyed different regions of southern food too. So yeah, I'm a

southerner.

Q. Awesome. So how long have you been here at Southern Living?

A. It will be 7 years in September, so about 6 and a half.

Q. Okay. Do you see any changes in the way you've handled the magazine throughout those years that you've been here or is it something that's been more constant? I guess, is there a new direction to the magazine taken? I mean, I know you've kind of done redesigning the appearance.

A. Yes, in photography its cleaner, fresher, more simple, shorter ingredient list, definitely. A reader might perceive a long ingredient list as a more difficult recipe and might not want to prepare that recipe for that reason. I think it's literally just kind of flipping through a magazine, it's almost like logical when you see a long ingredient list you think, "Oh, I'm not going to fool with that." But definitely we're trying to get that same good Southern Living food in there with the challenge of reducing the number of ingredients. And for that reason we turn to a lot convenience products, a lot of prepackaged things like – well bagged lettuce comes to mind or frozen vegetables. I can't think of a better example than that, but there are a number of convenience items out there that kind of help us –

Q. Help you cut down on the ingredient list?

A. Exactly.

Q. Okay. Awesome! How would you define southern, as it relates to the magazine as a whole but particularly to the food section?

A. How would I define southern? Hospitality, warmth, family, gathering, entertaining, I guess I can only give you key words.

Q. (CID)

A. Yeah. Food is southern to me. I mean everywhere you go in the South, it's all about the food. It really is.

Q. So I mean do you think the food section in the magazine plays a particular role in defining its southern nature, just by the kinds of food that you cover or the contact with the readers?

A. I think absolutely, and – not tooting my own horn. I don't want to sound arrogant here, but food is the most popular section in the magazine. And I think southerners gravitate to food. I really do. So yeah, I definitely think that helps define the magazine.

Q. I know that you've been doing more healthy living sections in the magazine. So is there somebody else that handles the healthy living section or do you say, "Okay.

These look like really healthy recipes, here you go."

A. Well, I'm a registered dietician, and we have another registered dietician on staff, and she and I actually do the food stories for healthy living. So there's another person who coordinates that section outside of foods but we'll collaborate with them and come up with story ideas.

Q. Okay. Awesome!

A. And that's where we can sneak in the Thai. Because healthy food, to me, means fresh ingredients. We have to watch our sodium, so a lot of those convenience items that we use in our main book, main section can't be used in healthy living, so we can kind of go outside the box a little bit in healthy living.

Q. Is that a fun section?

A. It is. I love it. It's full of lifestyle, and it's fresh. It gives me an outlet to talk about health and to teach about health rather than just foods, so I really enjoy it.

Q. So is it popular with the readers?

A. Very. And it's getting even more popular. I think they've been doing it for about 3 years at least, but the sections have grown. Now we have 4 times a year, healthy living sections and it's gotten – you can just look at the readers' scores and the bars have gone up. It's amazing. They're very happy with it. And they always – any time we do a survey with foods for the main section, readers are always asking – well they always want nutrition analysis on all of our recipes, but we can't give them that, but they're always asking for healthier recipes. But even in the main section outside of healthy, we do our best to lighten, you know. We're not greasing two pounds of butter in every recipe anymore. You know back in the day, when they put in 12 slices of bacon for everything. We're really watching even, quotation marks, non-healthy recipes. Some of them are (CID) healthy.

Q. It's healthy in comparison to –

A. Right. Based on what we used to do many years ago.

Q. Like I know hear stories about like, the South is the fattest region –

A. Absolutely. And I've heard a lot of people say, "Oh, you work for Southern Living foods? Why aren't you 500 pounds?" I mean that's the perception that people have about southern foods, that it's very fatty, full of saturated fats, and you know, it can be. Absolutely. I think some of our readers wouldn't want the nutrition analysis on some of those recipes. But we are working hard -- when we're taste-testing we think, "You know, I can taste the fat on the roof of my mouth. Let's reduce it a little bit. This is a little much." So I think our palates are changing, and I think the trend is to get more on the healthy side.

Q. Okay. Do you see Southern Living as kind of taking a readership role like, "Okay. Here's more healthy things." Or is it more of a response to the readers?

A. I think it's a response and a responsibility on our part.

Q. Okay. If I'm going into my thesis, and I'm trying to say the most important things about foods at Southern Living, what is it that I would need to include that I haven't asked you about yet?

A. Okay. Say that again. Let me process.

Q. Okay. I'm sitting down typing out my thesis, and there's going to be some question my professor's going to ask like, "Why did you figure this out?" Or, "What does Southern Living do about this?" Is there something that you're like, "This is what we deal with everyday."

A. Taste-testing.

Q. Okay.

A. Let me tell you about taste-testing, because that's actually what most people ask me when I tell them I work for Southern Living. We have a process of taste testing. It's actually very scientific. But first I'll tell you that our test kitchen staff has – they all shop at regular grocery stores. We don't order food. We shop as a reader would.

Q. Okay.

A. And then our kitchens are set up as an average homeowner would have.

Q. Okay.

A. So they will test a recipe folder. It might be my story on peach cobbler. And they have several folders going on, so any given day, they might test 5 to 10 stories, maybe more maybe less. And we will all gather around the table, all being editors and test kitchen staff. And the test kitchen person will present the food. We'll all taste it. We'll talk about it. If we like it, we'll rate it. And then we have rater system: One plus is, needs work, and it's pretty much a fail. A two is a solid, good recipe. A two plus, excellent. And a three, can't get any better. We very rarely publish three's.

Q. Okay.

A. I think if I had to guess – I don't know specifically what it would be, but we probably publish 50 three's out of 700, 800 recipes each year. So it's got to be really, really good to be a three.

Q. Mostly two's and two plus's?

A. Mostly two's and two plus's. And they're all really good. Again, this is a bunch

of food critics at the table, who have certain palates, so our standards are very high, which is good for the reader. So if something fails or if we need to rework it, we'll talk about, "What do we need to change about it? How can we make it better?" This and that

Q. Do you retest a lot of them?

A. We do a lot of retesting, yes. If we feel like there's promise in that recipe, sometimes we'll have that discussion, "Well, do y'all even really like the flavors here? Should we try to look at something else?" Or if we feel that it can be saved, we'll retest.

Q. Okay. Awesome.

A. It's an interesting process, but it helps us kind of –

Q. So you test every single recipe that goes in the magazine?

A. Every single recipe.

Q. Okay. So if Susie Smith sends you a recipe and you're like , "Oh, this sounds good." And then you test it?

A. Absolutely. Sometimes we might have to call Susie and ask her if we can use cilantro instead of basil because maybe we have another recipe running that month with basil in it.

Q. That's interesting.

A. And that way Susie can still be mentioned for her recipe, and hopefully she won't mind that we've changed her recipe. But that happens more often than not. I mean, we've even changed from chicken to pork just because we had too much chicken that month, but we really love this recipe and it's a good part of the story that they're developing.

Q. Okay. So that's pretty cool. How long is it usually – like do you just keep your recipes on file and you may come back to it in three years and say, "Oh, this one's good." And then you call them?

A. Yep. They're all on file. We have some regulars too, regular contributors.

Q. Really?

A. We hear from them almost every month, and they're (CID) recipe's. We have some, "Oh, it's Nora's recipe again. We know this one's going to be a good one." But yeah, we have probably six filing cabinets of recipes, and they're all categorized. And we date them when they come in, but they might sit there for years. I know there are some in there that are several years old. I think every now and then we sift through them and kind of (CID) the files but –

Q. Wow! That's awesome. Do you ever have trouble getting a hold of the readers again? Like if you can't get them, then do you have to like not use the recipe?

A. Sometimes it's hard to find them, yeah. You know, three major changes to a recipe, constitutes a new recipe. So that doesn't mean take out the salt.

Q. Right.

A. And the pepper and one (CID). that's not really a new recipe. It has to be a major change. So sometimes if we can't get a hold of the readers, we may kind to redevelop off of that recipe.

Q. So do the people in the test kitchens do that? Or do you work on doing the recipes?

A. Sometimes for our bigger stories I might be assigned to a test kitchen person, and together we might think of what we could do for this peach cobbler story that's different. Or sometimes the editor will just enlist the help of the test kitchen person, and if there is a developer and that's their strong point and that's what they want to do, they can run with it. I've actually developed recipes on paper and sent them down, and I've said, "I'm not sure – this sounds good, but you can tweak it as you wish." So we all kind of are constantly developing and thinking about flavor profiles and all that fun stuff.

Q. Okay. Awesome. That sounds really good. Well thank you for talking with me about this.

A. You're very welcome.