

Community Journalism for the 21st Century: Cultural Competence and Student Reporting in Urban Neighborhoods

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This study sought to identify factors that influence the cultural competence of student journalists covering urban neighborhoods. The findings indicate that professional norms, including objectivity, contribute to a culturally competent approach to community reporting. An over-reliance on these norms, however, can hinder culturally competent reporting. Empirical support was found for previously identified dimensions of cultural competence: awareness, knowledge, and skills to interact effectively with people from different cultures, as well as that the ability to negotiate an “insider” or “outsider” status. The study provides the possibility of a new norm for community journalism—to promote understanding across cultures.

Community journalism, like the rest of the news industry, is undergoing major changes in the way that it conceptualizes, produces and presents news content. Digital technologies in particular have created an unprecedented interconnectedness within localities and across the globe, which has re-oriented the field of community journalism toward geographically dispersed audiences as well as previously untapped local communities (Garyantes, 2012; Meyer & Daniels, 2012; Reader, 2012). The result has been a re-examination of the requirements of the field, including the need to connect with and better understand people from a wide range of communities and cultures.

This study seeks to identify the factors that influence the cultural competence of community reporters by studying journalism students as they report on urban communities in a large northeastern city. The communities covered by the students are, for the most part, quite culturally different from the cultural backgrounds and perspectives of the students, according to demographic data and student surveys.

The need to understand cultures other than one’s own has been growing in importance. The process of globalization, in which people and nations are becoming more integrated economically, politically, and culturally, is continuing, even in the face of the dramatic global

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economic downturn in late 2008 (McNulty, 2009). In recent decades, the pace of globalization “has dramatically increased. Unprecedented changes in communications, transportation, and computer technology have given the process new impetus and made the world more interdependent than ever” (Global Policy Forum, 2014, p. 1). Meanwhile, U.S. Census figures predict the U.S. population will be considerably older and more racially and ethnically diverse by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). We are becoming more integrated worldwide and more diverse domestically.

Studies of the news industry have found people learn about diverse cultures and perspectives through the news media (Hannerz, 2004; Lippmann, 1922; Tuchman, 1978). Journalists, however, have been criticized for their inability to effectively and accurately report about cultures and perspectives that differ from their own (Brennen & Duffy, 2003; Davis & Kent, 2013; Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, 2006; Ibrahim, 2003; Natarajan & Xiaoming, 2003). Some practitioners and scholars have advocated for a new approach to journalism that is more inclusive of diverse perspectives and has the potential to enhance our understanding of others (Davis & Kent, 2013; Gans, 1980, 2011; Hallin & Briggs, 2015).

For students learning about the craft of journalism, the concepts taught include objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and a code of ethics, which are related to the traditions of the profession and the socialization of reporters (Folkerts, 2014; Mari, 2015). Today, the instruction of multimedia and digital skills has been added to most journalism programs (Creech & Mendelson, 2015; Kelley, 2007). Above all, the notion of public service and journalism’s role in democracy have underscored the evolution of the profession and its accompanying curricula (Deuze, 2006; Lowe & Stavitsky, 2016; Mari, 2015). Because reporting is grounded in public service and is so closely intertwined in its community and the world at large, a journalism curriculum needs to “define ways to culturally and thematically contextualize its program” (Deuze, 2006, p. 27).

One way to bridge differences in cultures is through “cultural competence,” a relatively new concept that has been embraced by an increasing number of professions, including social work, psychology, public relations, second-language training, business, government, education, and health care. Cultural competence involves the extent to which individuals develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to understand and work effectively with people from a variety of cultures (D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Georgetown University’s Center for Child and Human Development features a National Center for Cultural Competence (2016), while the National Association of Social Workers (2001) has developed a policy that “charges social workers with the ethical responsibility to be culturally competent” (p. 7). Cultural competence programs also have proliferated in U.S. medical schools in response to increasing national diversity and mandates from accrediting bodies (Kripalani, Bussey-Jones, Katz, & Genao, 2006).

While cultural competence during the past several decades has been expanding in use and credibility, the concept also has been criticized as vaguely defined, inconsistently measured, and missing important perspectives (Herman, Tucker, Ferdinand, Mirsu-Paun, Hasan, & Beato, 2007; Kocarek, Talbot, Batka, & Anderson, 2001). Others criticisms include that the concept does not address dimensions such as power, structure, and positionality (Dean, 2001; Jenks, 2011; Suzuki, McRae, & Short, 2001). Still other scholars maintain the concept actually narrows the concept of culture and can lead to stereotyping (Lee & Farrell, 2006).

This study seeks to address criticisms about the concept as it attempts to determine the factors that influence the cultural competence of university students learning journalism skills

through a community journalism project. By studying cultural competence in relation to student journalists and their work, we can gain new knowledge about the concept and its potential to be included in journalism curricula, increase the possibility that community news reporting will be more inclusive of diverse perspectives, and potentially enhance our understanding of others and ourselves.

Community, Community Journalism, and Cultural Competence

The concept of community is multifaceted and difficult to define. An early definition of community is that it is a master system encompassing social forms and cultural behavior in interdependent systems or institutions (Arensberg & Kimball, 1972). Lowrey, Brozana and Mackay (2008) defined community as a process of negotiating shared symbolic meaning and noted that community media aid this process by “both encouraging pluralism and offering cohesive, coherent representations of the community” (p. 1). Community also has been defined as existing in the abstract, where there is a sense of commonality among people, and in the concrete, where specific groups of people connect over certain circumstances or interests (Christensen & Levinson, 2003).

Further distinctions among communities can be found in the Encyclopedia of Community (Christensen & Levinson, 2003) and in an essay published by Hatcher and Reader (2012), which distinguish communities as proximate communities, in which membership depends on residence in a particular place; primordial communities, or those built around ethnicity or shared heritage; instrumental communities, which are developed around specific, relatively short-term goals such as political purposes; and affinity communities, which connect people by areas of common interest. Today, virtual communities, which connect people online in diverse and socially supportive ways free from geography, also thrive (Hampton, 2003).

Urban neighborhoods, which are the focus of this study, share the complexities and characteristics of community outlined above – including but not limited to proximity, shared heritage, and affinity - and often are served by community media (Janowitz, 1952). The various conceptualizations of community necessitate a need for reporters to understand and represent a community’s overlapping layers and definitions.

Community journalism historically has been characterized by small newspapers covering a specified geographical area with an emphasis on local reporting and close relationships between the reporters and audience members (Kennedy, 1974; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2012). The emphasis of the coverage, according to Lauterer and Reader, was on people and face-to-face interactions. The degree and implications of “connectivity” between journalism and its communities are important, particularly in the study of community journalism (Reader, 2012). This focus on community in community journalism encourages reporters to determine the priorities of local residents, as well as their concerns and perspectives on different issues (Kurpius, 1999).

Today, however, increased mobility and digital technologies have fostered the emergence of communities that are connected not by particular places, but by common interests and the distribution of information. Rather than defined by geography, community “instead becomes more about shared interests than shared locations” (Meyer & Daniels, 2012, p. 199). The structural shift from communities of place to digital, niche communities presents potential challenges for community journalism (Friedland, 2012). News organizations, local news and civic engagement could be diminished or even lost if the trend continues. This potential loss was

uncovered in one study, which found local residents were mixed in their support of a new county-run digital information and media center (Mwangi, Smethers, & Bressers, 2014). While some residents strongly supported the center, others were critical of its high cost and said their lack of technical skills prevented them from participating in the center's information hub (Mwangi, Smethers, & Bressers, 2014).

Other studies have found, however, that the new breed of online news entrepreneurs, particularly former journalists, has been primarily focused on the public service mission of covering local communities (Ferrucci, 2015; Nee, 2013). Moreover, the goal of online communities and traditional community journalists is similar: to bring people together (Meyer & Daniels, 2012). Thus, the move to online communication potentially has both deleterious and beneficial effects to community journalism.

Community and community journalism are located within the larger context of culture (Arensberg & Kimball, 1972; Deuze, 2006; Hatcher, 2012). Yet the concept of culture also has been evolving and becoming more complex over time. Over the past 140 years, anthropologists have conceptualized culture from “a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1874, p. 1) to a total way of life, a way of thinking, feeling, and believing (Geertz, 1973; Rosaldo, 1993). Culture is a broad concept, one that is learned, historically situated, and continually evolving (Geertz, 1973; Rosaldo, 1993). Geertz (1973) wrote culture is a way of creating meaning and artfully described it as “webs of significance that he (man) himself has spun” (p. 5). It is characterized by change, inconsistencies, and contradictions. Moreover, individuals have multiple identities within a culture.

Anthropologists, sociologists, and other social researchers also acknowledge subcultures within larger cultures that are based on their own values and norms (Mendoza-Denton & Boum, 2015; Vigil, 2003). Another perspective involves the notion of cultures in the plural, which denotes difference and situates cultures within various contexts (Brumann, 1999; Hannerz, 1997), while cultural processes (Appadurai, 1996) also indicate difference and help to mobilize group identities. Thus, culture is a major influence within and on communities and needs to be understood by community journalists.

Cultural competence

Definitions of cultural competence vary, although most focus on “the capacity to function effectively in other cultural contexts” (Paz, 2008, p. 3). One conceptualization adapted from a definition developed by Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989) states cultural competence is “a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum” (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2016, p. 1). The three main dimensions of cultural competence as used by Sue et al. (1992) and D'Andrea et al. (1991) are still used in most conceptualizations and models of cultural competence today. They are awareness of one's own perspectives and biases (also referred to as attitudes and beliefs), knowledge about culture and cultural perspectives, and skills to interact with a variety of people belonging to various cultural groups.

While cultural competence is considered valuable in a variety of professions, some studies have associated it with positive outcomes. In research examining the effects of cultural competence training in health care, for example, cultural competence training has been related to

positive patient outcomes (Lie, Lee-Rey, Gomez, Bereknyei, & Braddock III, 2010) and the potential to reduce ethnic and racial health disparities (Lie, Carter-Pokras, Braun, & Coleman, 2012). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health and individual U.S. states now actively promote cultural competence training and approaches in health care (amednews.com, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Cultural competence has not been adopted in the field of journalism in the same way other professions, particularly by the medical, mental health and social work fields, have embraced it, yet some of the goals of the journalism profession and journalism education are aligned with the concept. The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics (2014), for example, states journalists should "boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear" (n.p.) and to avoid stereotyping. It adds "journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting" (p.1). In another example, one of the nine standards outlined by the Accrediting Council of Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (2017) is Diversity and Inclusiveness, which includes curriculum that "fosters understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of domestic concerns about gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation...(and) across diverse cultures in a global society" (p. 1).

In a study of 105 accredited and non-accredited journalism programs, researchers found that the relevance of diversity for all types of practitioners in mass communication and the importance of diversity in the job market were reasons why journalism programs made diversity important in their curricula (Biswas & Izard, 2009). Biswas and Izard wrote: "Cultural competence and multicultural knowledge are increasingly being demanded in the diverse, competitive environment of the job market" (p. 391). Moreover, employers also believe diversity and cultural awareness are skills sets that are vital in the communications field (Gotlieb, McLaughlin & Cummins, 2017; Herk, 2015). Herk (2015) cited surveys that found employers believe it is important for candidates to possess "knowledge related to being able to work effectively in organizations and markets that are increasingly global and diverse. This runs the gamut from 'awareness and experience of' diverse cultures (either inside or outside the U.S.)... to the ability to work with/get along with others from diverse cultures ... to the ability to 'operate' in different cultural settings" (p. 5).

Factors that have been identified as contributors to cultural competence in previous research include the ability to examine one's own prejudices and biases toward other cultures, understand the other person's world view, and directly engage in and desire to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Campinha-Bacote, 1999); demonstration of open-mindedness, self-confidence, inquisitiveness, and maturity, as outlined in the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory (CCTDT) (Doutrich & Storey, 2004); and the ability to explore and reflect on culture, racism, classism, sexism, and historical factors that might shape health behaviors (Betancourt, 2003).

The concept has largely been measured quantitatively through surveys and indices developed for cultural competence training (Delgado, Ness, Ferguson, Engstrom, Gannon, & Gillett, 2013), although some scholars have argued the concept of culture itself is complicated and best assessed through mixed methods or qualitative research methods (Johnston & Herzig, 2006; Williams, 2007). A problematic aspect of the concept is the notion of obtaining specific knowledge of cultures other than one's own. Critics of cultural competence argue that having "knowledge" of a culture can lead to stereotyping. Some anthropologists have argued the cultural competence ultimately essentializes the complex nature of culture and could be a "backdoor to

racism” (Lee and Farrell, 2006, p. 1).

The term “competence” also has been challenged (Kirmayer, 2012; Kleinman & Benson, 2006). Competence can indicate the erroneous notion that culture can be reduced to a technical skill for which professionals can be trained (Kleinman & Benson, 2006). These criticisms have led current cultural competence scholars to argue it is time to move past the concept’s “list of traits” or “do’s and don’ts” approach to cross-cultural interactions and develop an open, questioning approach with people from different cultural groups about how social, cultural, or economic factors influence their lives (Betancourt, 2006; Betancourt & Green, 2010; Jenks, 2011; Kleinman & Benson, 2006).

This research seeks to identify factors that influence the cultural competence of student journalists through a case study of undergraduate student reporters producing a community news website in a culturally diverse, urban setting. A broad operational definition of cultural competence was constructed for the study that conceptualizes cultural competence as a broad, multidimensional process and includes the three main dimensions of cultural competence tailored specifically for community journalists: awareness of one’s own cultural perspectives, knowledge of culture and cultural perspectives, and the skills and attributes to effectively and appropriately communicate, interact with, and represent people from a variety of cultures (see Appendix 1). The knowledge dimension of cultural competence was divided into two levels: 1) a broad “macro” level, which includes an understanding that collective cultural practices conform to common codes and norms, shared language, and common historical, political, social, and economic development; and 2) an understanding of an anti-essentialized “micro” level of culture, which includes complexities of culture such as that culture is not static, but a *process* that is constantly being constructed by people within the culture, that there are as many differences and influences within a cultural group as between different cultural groups, that cultures continually change due to internal and external influences, and that individuals can have multiple identities within the culture.

Research Questions

The theoretical underpinnings of the research include the social construction of reality, which examines how people within social groups interpret the world around them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz, 1944), and concepts related to social cognition including individual and group schema, attribution, and cognitive complexity, which address how individuals and societies construct and perceive the world around them (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Hamilton, Devine & Ostrom, 1994). Increased attention to these matters could lead to a more culturally competent approach to journalism, which would encourage an awareness of one’s biases and could motivate a reporter to seek out alternative schemata. In addition, a higher level of cognitive complexity on the part of reporters, in which they are able to perceive diversity in opinion, grasp ambiguity, and understand that knowledge and values are contextual rather than right or wrong, will help them transcend their own perspectives or question their narrow perspectives. Support for the cultural competence of journalists also could begin a renewed discussion of issues such as the importance of providing multiple perspectives, or providing a more “multiperspectival” approach to news, as advocated by Gans (2011). Two main research questions were explored:

RQ1: What are the specific factors that contribute to the cultural competence of student community journalists?

RQ2: What specific factors hinder student community journalists' ability to offer culturally competent news coverage?

Method

This case study is based on survey, interview, and participant observation data collected from 2007 to 2009 from student journalists working in a multimedia urban reporting lab. The lab is at a large northeastern university, where student reporters work in groups of two or three to produce multimedia news pieces about urban neighborhoods that are under-served by the mainstream media. Cultural competence was not taught as part of the course, although the students were encouraged by the professors in the lab to be open-minded, fair and accurate in their reporting about the neighborhoods. It is worth noting that student journalists are an important population to study because they represent the next generation of reporters who are likely to produce content for online publications and for culturally diverse, even global, audiences.

This research represents the second phase of a larger research study. An earlier phase of the case study involved an in-depth analysis of the reporting and news texts by two groups of student journalists covering the same urban neighborhood (Garyantes, 2012). The first phase of the study also used a multi-method approach to identify factors that influence the cultural competence of journalists. The findings included the students were able to negotiate their "insider-outsider" status in the neighborhood and the increased context provided by multimedia storytelling offered the potential to move the reporters and their news texts toward a more culturally competent approach to community journalism.

In order to further refine the factors that influence reporter cultural competence and study them on a broader scale, this phase of the research examines a wider range of the student reporters' experiences in and perceptions of various neighborhoods, as reported through more than 200 survey responses and dozens of in-depth interviews. These data were triangulated with participant observations and interviews with news sources and neighborhood representatives, who reviewed the students' news texts representing their cultures and communities.

Specifically, the data include 223 self-assessment surveys of the student reporters administered at the beginning and end of the semester over six semesters. The 38-question survey at the start of the semester involved closed- and open-ended questions on topics such as the student reporters' awareness of cultural influences on themselves and others, their perceived ability to relate to and interpret individuals who have cultural perspectives different from their own, their level of knowledge about the neighborhood they covered, and their perceived ability to understand and represent the complexities of the neighborhood. The second survey was a 19-question instrument that asked closed- and open-ended questions related to the students' experiences in the field, such as their perceived ability to represent the communities in news texts and how their perceptions of the neighborhood had changed during the semester, if at all.

The case study also included 71 randomized, semi-structured interviews with 46 student reporters, 17 news sources, 4 representatives of neighborhoods covered by the students, and 4 professors from the multimedia class. The interviews with the news sources and neighborhood representatives contained questions similar to those in the survey about the students' ability to relate to and interpret people and cultures in the communities they covered and served as an important counterbalance to the students' perceptions of their community interactions and resulting news texts. Moreover, the news sources and neighborhood representatives reviewed the

news texts produced by the students and assessed whether they accurately and fairly represented the community and its cultures.

Within the random sample of student interviewees, 28 participant observations were conducted with 15 different student reporting groups covering 11 different neighborhoods. Participant observation has not been used extensively as a data collection method in previous cultural competence scholarship and use of this method helped refine measures for the concept. The data collected during the observations included formal, informal and non-verbal behavior and communication between the reporters and their sources, the types of sources the students sought, and the nature of the information collected during reporting.

Themes from the data were drawn using a theoretical thematic analysis approach, which uses the study's research questions to guide the analysis and identifies, analyzes and reports patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted using a six-step approach: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and documenting the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The 223 survey respondents ranged in age from 20 to 37 years old, with 87.4% (n = 181) falling between 21 and 24 years of age. The classes contained more women than men (58.4% female, n = 128; 41.6% male, n = 91). Three-quarters of the students reported their ethnicity as Caucasian (73%, n=154), while 13.7% (n=29) reported their ethnicity as Black or African-American, 4.7% (n=10) were of mixed race, 4% (n=9) were Asian, 3.3% (n=7) were "Other," including Russian, African, and Trinidadian, and .9 (n=2) were Hispanic or Latino.

Nearly half (43.5%, n=87) of the students reported that they came from families with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more; one-quarter (24%, n=48) reported annual family incomes of more than \$100,000. Nearly two thirds (63.3%, n = 133) described the community in which they grew up as suburban, one quarter (21.4%, n = 45) described the community in which they grew up as urban, while approximately 11% (n = 23) reported they grew up in rural areas. More than half of the respondents (54.1%, n = 112) said the communities in which they lived had populations of 100,000 or less; more than one quarter (28%, n =58) grew up in communities with fewer than 30,000 people.

The city in which the study took place has a population of approximately 1.5 million people, 44.2 % of whom are Black or African-American, 36.3% White, and 13.3% of Hispanic or Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The Census also reported that approximately 22.2% of the population is under 18 years of age and 12.4% was 65 years old and over, while the median household income from 2009-2013 was \$37,192.

Factors Influencing the Cultural Competence of Student Journalists

For ease in reporting the findings, RQ1, which examined factors that contribute to the cultural competence of community journalists, and RQ2, which asked about factors that hinder the cultural competence of community journalists, were combined. The themes that emerged from the data indicated that the use of certain professional norms and routines, particularly an objective approach to reporting, contributes to a culturally competent approach to reporting. However, an over-reliance on these norms, such as solely focusing on facts and accurate information and minimizing context, is a potential hindrance to cultural competence.

The data also suggest support for a finding from the first phase of the study—that the ability to negotiate an "insider" or "outsider" status contributes to cultural competence.

Empirical support also was found for the dimensions of cultural competence identified in previous research, while an absence of the previously identified factors was found to be a potential hindrance to a culturally competent approach to reporting.

Relying on Journalistic Norms and Routines: An Objective Approach

News sources, neighborhood representatives and the student reporters all indicated that objectivity in reporting helped to promote positive interactions with sources and news texts that accurately represented life in the neighborhoods. They suggested that the objective approach allowed students to step away from their own perspectives and avoid biases in order to fairly represent the reality of the cultures within the neighborhoods—an indicator of cultural competence. For example, a drug treatment counselor who had been interviewed by students reviewed their video focusing on the neighborhood's drug market and said they had provided a fair representation of life in the community. "That's the reality," he said. A city resident that was interviewed as a news source for another story said:

It didn't seem like [the reporter] had much experience with this neighborhood at all, but it didn't seem like it made her close-minded about it or judgmental about [the neighborhood]. It doesn't have the best reputation, but she didn't come with pre-conceived concepts.

A neighborhood representative who reviewed student news stories about his community said the reporters had done a good job of representing life in the neighborhood and noted:

I think it's important for reporters to open themselves up every time they do a story, to open themselves up and say, "I'm not gonna bring anything to this"... That could be difficult if you have a student who grew up in rural America and then they come to an urban setting... that's a lot to overcome right away.... I don't know if they teach that in classes, but I think that's part of it.

The students themselves indicated in surveys and interviews that taking an objective approach to reporting helped them avoid bias and fairly represent the neighborhoods. For example, in open-ended responses to the survey question, "Why/Why not were you able to accurately represent life in the neighborhood through your media coverage?" the 223 respondents indicated 60 times at either the beginning or end of the semester that reliance on professional norms such as objectivity helped them to accurately represent life in the neighborhoods. Some students indicated they were able to represent the complexities of the neighborhoods by stepping away from their own perspectives and allowing others to "tell their story." Others said they were able to represent the complexities of life in the communities by not inserting their opinions or exploiting residents in news stories, by remaining open-minded, and by asking only pertinent questions. One student reporter said in an interview: "Don't compare it to your own culture unless that's ultimately what your piece is about.... Try to turn off that filter in your brain that says, 'Well, we do things differently.'"

Participant observations of student reporters in the field confirmed that they were able to interact with residents in a neutral, objective, respectful and professional way. Although common courtesy or the presence of the researcher could have influenced this dynamic, it seems that the

students—as evidenced by their own comments—were exercising the norm of using an objective approach to journalism to bypass their biases and perspectives.

An Over-Reliance on Norms And Routines

Some student reporters indicated in open-ended survey responses that they were relying exclusively on journalistic norms such as an objective approach or the quest for accurate information in order to report on the neighborhoods. One student wrote in the survey, “I think I can (represent the neighborhood) well because I’m very unfamiliar with the neighborhood, that (sic) allows me to be and stay objective.” Another said he was able to represent life in the neighborhood “because being a reporter is about reporting the facts and conveying peoples’ stories to the public, even people of a differing culture. As long as one does their (sic) job accurately, this can be accomplished.”

Being unfamiliar with a neighborhood and relying on accuracy can be problematic in community news coverage, according to news sources. Sufficient context is key. An editor from a community newspaper who was interviewed by students as a news source said the facts in a student story about housing in the neighborhood were accurate, but the piece was ultimately incomplete. He said: “What it doesn’t capture is why, because there is a lot of housing stock in [the neighborhood] that is in bad shape.... It is accurate, as far as it goes. It’s quite accurate, in fact.” The editor said the story needed more context in order to get closer to the local residents’ perspective. One student reporter validated this comment when she suggested during an interview that community reporters need to go beyond facts when they’re reporting and producing news stories. She said: “I think journalists can be kind of cocky about that, like, ‘Yeah, I got all the facts.’ I think it’s more than the facts.”

Awareness of and Ability to Negotiate an “Insider” or “Outsider” Status

The ability to negotiate one’s role as an “insider” or “outsider” in a community has become complicated for community journalists. As noted earlier, community journalists historically have considered themselves part of the fabric of a community and were comfortable with an “insider” role. Yet, today’s digital environment has disrupted these traditions and the student reporters in this study represented that disruption. While some students were residents of the communities they covered, making them traditional “insiders,” most were not and considered themselves “outsiders.” Being an “outsider” meant the student reporters had to develop strategies to understand and accurately represent the communities and their cultures to other “insiders.” Moreover, because their news texts were community-focused and appeared online, they also had to explain and represent the communities to other “outsiders,” since their audience had expanded beyond the neighborhoods’ geographic boundaries.

As “outsiders,” the students said they found it difficult to understand and represent the communities they were covering. For example, when responding to the open-ended survey question, “Why/Why not were you able to accurately represent life in the neighborhood through your media coverage?,” 34 mentioned they found it difficult to represent life in the neighborhoods because they felt like “outsiders” in the communities. One student wrote: “I...feel like the people who actually live there would be better suited for the job.” Another student reporter said in an interview, “I definitely felt like an outsider...just because I’m not from around here and I think I kind of give off that, like I just...I don’t think I have the [city] vibe.” He

added:

The way I feel about the neighborhood is kind of like...what happens behind closed doors...stays behind closed doors...and that's how I feel my stories have kind of turned out...just like, OK, whatever is going on...I don't really know...but what they put on the outside is what I can report on...what they're willing to disclose.

It is important to note that the students raised the issue of being an “outsider” more in the beginning of the semester than toward the end of the semester. This finding indicates student reporters were finding ways to negotiate their initial “outsider” status. Students who felt like “outsiders” said in interviews and surveys that they were able to navigate this potential barrier in a number of ways, including strategies that involved skills related to cultural competence such as remaining open-minded and spending time in the neighborhood to build trust with residents. Other strategies included conducting a great deal of research about the community so they could talk knowledgeably with sources, working in groups so they felt more comfortable in the neighborhood, being open and making friends with the residents, allowing people to tell their own stories with little interference from the reporter, and gaining access to “insider” sources who could help move the journalist closer to an “insider” status. Some students said they even dressed in ways that would not immediately identify them as outsiders. Observations of students in the field revealed that some student reporters were able to negotiate an “outsider” status by being friendly with local residents and by taking a genuine interest in their lives. Two students preparing to interview a local artist in his home played with his dog for a time before beginning to set up their equipment. Another group of students interviewing residents in a senior citizens housing complex spent time looking at the ladies’ homemade crafts before and after their interviews.

There were 30 students who reported in the survey they had grown up in the city in which the study took place, and at least four students grew up in the same neighborhoods they were covering for the class. These “insider” student journalists reported the advantages of this status, such as being comfortable moving around in the community, easily generating story ideas, and being able to more quickly build trust with news sources. Yet, in some ways it was almost easier to operate as “outsiders” when acting as journalists in the community, according to these students, because they felt they would be able to be more objective and would be taken more seriously by neighborhood residents. One representative of a neighborhood covered by the students said in an interview:

I think it is important for everyone to recognize different perspectives whether you are an insider or an outsider.... It is easier as an insider as long as you understand the outsider's perspective because that is whom you are writing for.... For an outsider, you kind of have to come at it from the back door as being able to understand the insider's point of view without judging it. Neither one is easy.

Evidence of Previously Identified Dimensions of Cultural Competence

The most common dimensions associated with cultural competence in previous studies are awareness, knowledge and skills. The data in this study, much of which were gathered using an

inductive approach, found empirical support for these previously identified dimensions of cultural competence.

Awareness of the importance of culture and one’s own cultural perspective: Some of the student journalists indicated in open-ended survey responses and in interviews they understood their perspectives about the world were due in part to their cultural backgrounds. One student wrote in the survey: “My culture, African-American, greatly impacts how I see myself in society as a whole. I attribute my background in the ways I can overcome struggles just like my ancestors overcame slavery and segregation.” Another said: “Being Jewish, culture is a really big part of my life.... So I can relate to that, for the people, the Latino people of (the neighborhood) because that they take so much pride in it and I do in my own.” While these comments reflect what anthropologists might consider a narrow view of culture—one based on ethnicity and religious beliefs—they also express an understanding of culture as conceptualized by anthropologists as the way people make sense of their lives or the ways in which people make meaning in their lives.

In some cases, a student’s self-awareness developed as a result of reporting in the neighborhoods. One student, who with her group produced a multimedia package about one neighborhood’s drug culture that one of their news sources called “impressive” and a “well-rounded, well-covered piece,” said in an interview she became aware of and changed her views of the neighborhood as a result of reporting on the story. She said:

I used to think of a drug addict as a bum, didn’t really think of them as a person, you know? And I couldn’t understand their mindset or why they would be that way. I didn’t have any sympathy for why they would do that.... But I just realized the humanness of everything.... Like [one addict and drug dealer she interviewed] grew up there his whole entire life. It’s the only thing he knew so how can you really blame him if that was the only life he was exposed to.

Lacking awareness of the importance of culture and one’s position, cultural perspectives and biases: A potential inhibitor to a culturally competent approach to community reporting was a lack of understanding on the part of the student reporters of the concept of culture, their own positions, and their own cultural perspectives. For example, 12 of the students who said in the survey that they believed their cultural backgrounds had a “very limited” or “limited” influence on their thinking and behavior said they believed this was because they were not part of a particular “culture.” One student wrote, “When you come from a place that doesn’t have culture, but rather a zip code and a lot of trees, you learn to be malleable to your present settings, since there is little ingrained ways about you.” This student seemed to believe that being part of the white, suburban culture in the United States meant she did not have a “culture” and therefore did not have a cultural lens through which she viewed the world.

Another potential inhibitor to a culturally competent approach to community reporting was the concomitant tendency to unconsciously categorize the neighborhoods and their residents into broad categories that are socially constructed or created through abstracted notions or schema. For example, one student reporter describing the mostly Latino neighborhood he was covering said in an interview:

It doesn't feel like America, you know, it kind of feels like a foreign place cause everything is just Puerto Rican. The marquee signs are in Spanish and people are speaking Spanish, eating Spanish food - I mean Puerto Rican food - I just didn't think that was in [the city], you know?

This student's remarks reflected not only a lack of knowledge that Puerto Rican people hold U.S. citizenship, but also a stereotype of what it is to be "American." The student implied that the broad, stereotyped category of "America" is non-Latino, or, more specifically, presumably speaking English and eating food that would be not associated with Puerto Rico.

Knowledge of culture and cultural perspectives: An understanding of culture, including a particular culture's structure and history, or "macro" knowledge, as well as its complexities and contradictions, or "micro" knowledge, is tremendously important, according to news sources. In interviews and participant observations, it was found that students gained much of their macro-level knowledge through Internet research, while micro-level knowledge was gathered by spending time in the neighborhoods and talking to residents.

Regarding "micro" level knowledge, nearly all of the 46 students interviewed indicated they had developed some micro knowledge of the neighborhood during the semester; several mentioned they had come to appreciate the complexities of the neighborhood, its cultures, and the people in it. One student expressed an understanding of the need for micro-level knowledge when she wrote on her start-of-the-semester survey, "I know that there are people in the neighborhood that actually care and sometimes you just need to take a closer look at things." Another wrote:

I've realized the [neighborhood] is more than a few corner bodegas and Catholic churches. There's so much more to the Latino community there, and they're all very willing to tell their stories. They just need people who care to listen.

Another student demonstrated an understanding of the concepts of culture, cultural competence, and the various cultures within the neighborhood she was covering when she noted it was difficult to represent her neighborhood in news texts because "there's just so many dimensions of that neighborhood.... There's so many different levels and I don't even think there would be enough time for us to really do every one justice."

Observations of students in the neighborhoods demonstrated their accumulation of a certain amount of micro knowledge. They recognized people on the street, possessed a certain level of comfort and knowledge of how to get around in the neighborhood, and were able to recognize neighborhood nuances. Some students knew storeowners and some people on the street by name. Others were able to explain cultural symbols, such as a certain type of music played by the residents or the urban symbol of sneakers dangling on telephone lines.

Lack of knowledge of culture, including its "macro" and "micro" aspects: The data also suggest, however, that the students' micro knowledge, like all knowledge, according to Clifford (1986), was only partial. The students themselves noted there was much about the neighborhoods they did not know. Several observations revealed some of the student reporters would frequent the same people or places for stories. In some neighborhoods, there were entire sections, particularly residential sections, that students knew little or nothing about. One student noted the

influence of popular culture in his neighborhood when he said he “didn’t see much” culture there because:

There’s a lot, I think there is a lot of pop culture. You know, kind of, a lot of pop culture kind of dominating the culture.... In my hometown... you see groups that carry on tradition or are creating tradition but, I think it’s hard to find.

The student was implying a conceptualization of culture based on maintaining traditions rather than culture as a changeable process that is influenced by phenomena such as popular culture. Thus, the students during their time in the neighborhoods gained some understanding of the nuances and micro levels of the local cultures. However, their micro-level knowledge was limited, which likely affected the news content they were able to produce.

Macro-level knowledge of the neighborhoods also seemed to be lacking. One news source, commenting on a student’s story about dropout rates at a neighborhood high school, said the story needed historical context to explain why some students were not attending school. She said:

If you look at deseg [desegregation] in this community, you didn’t cross Front Street if you were a person of color because you got your ass kicked... There is a culture there, so if you were a kid who went to [one local high school] or [another local high school] and would get whooped after school if you didn’t make it on the bus, you would tend not to go over there. Culturally that still exists. So people have to understand those historical perspectives.

About one-quarter (n=12) of the 46 students interviewed explicitly expressed the importance the macro-level knowledge of their neighborhood’s history in interviews, although, in some cases, they said its history was important because it was a major part of the community’s identity. Most students said they had done some research about their neighborhoods before they went out, but few had a specific understanding of a neighborhood’s history or the political and social forces that had an impact on its development. Students did not cite a particular reason for not knowing the history of a neighborhood; the historical and political context did not seem to be a priority for them.

Skills and attributes to effectively and appropriately communicate, interact with and represent a variety of cultures. Skills related to a more culturally competent approach to journalism include being able to communicate effectively and appropriately with people in a community during formal interviews and informal encounters. This effective communication includes clarity of verbal and nonverbal communication with sources and a lack of communication miscues with sources. Other skills and attributes involve being able to listen well, having empathy and respect for local residents, being able to start conversations and prompt responses from residents about local concerns, being adaptive, and having confidence when communicating with others. Some attributes and skills related to cultural competence were unique to community journalism, including interviewing a wide variety of local residents and community leaders for news stories.

Observations and interviews with students and their sources revealed that the student community reporters in varying degrees demonstrated these culturally competent skills and

attributes. One news source said of a student community reporter, “My impression was that this particular writer captured the essence of our concerns here in the local community.... She listened. She listened and she asked me questions for clarification.” She praised the student’s article about a local issue because it included perspectives from “across the span of community members... She did get just about every facet that I could think of.”

The need for effective communication in order to learn about the community and its cultures was raised by another news source, who said:

Communication... a lot of people take it for granted. Just cause we know some words and we talk back and forth doesn’t mean that you’re always understanding the message that someone’s trying to give. It’s a real skill, and even if you have a reporter who’s excellent in it, you could be interviewing someone who may not be getting the message that they want out... conveying it correctly in words. So that art of communication is very important.

Lack of skills and attributes to effectively and appropriately communicate, interact with and represent a variety of cultures: In some cases, however, the student community journalists were unable to communicate effectively with sources, sometimes due to language barriers but at other times due to miscues or a misreading of the neighborhood and its culture. One news source told the story of a student who called him to talk about the issue of his neighborhood being “blighted.” He said:

I don’t even understand what the term “blighted” is. And so when you use a term like that to describe a neighborhood, you should understand how it’s used and what it means and what makes this neighborhood “blighted” and that neighborhood not “blighted.” And sometimes it’s a matter of perspective.

Other students discussed in interviews and during participant observations that relating to neighborhood residents meant getting “down to their level,” as if there is a hierarchy in place in which the students are placed above the residents, requiring them to move “down” in order to relate to them. In an interview, the community newspaper editor said, “Don’t assume that people are not cognitive, very cognitive, of issues of their lives because they don’t look middle-class or talk it. People are not dumb. People are smart about things that matter to them.”

Discussion and Implications

This research seeks to address gaps in cultural competence scholarship by applying the concept to student journalists and identifying factors that could influence their potential to adopt a culturally competent approach to community reporting. The research also aids in refining the definition and measures of cultural competence. The data revealed that the students’ use of an objective approach to journalism helped them to step away from their own cultural perspectives and effectively and appropriately interact with news sources from a variety of different cultures. Promotion of professional norms such as an objective approach to news is vital at this time in the journalism profession when reporters and user-generated content are moving away from professionalism and more toward personal expression.

Yet relying solely on certain norms such as the quest for stories, facts, and accurate information, as some students did, cannot replace the thoughtfulness that goes into becoming aware of one's position and perception of the world, then having the willingness, if necessary, to challenge one's attitudes and beliefs. In addition, some students minimized context in their news stories, according to news sources, which moved the texts away from a culturally competent approach to community journalism. In order to become more culturally competent, journalists would need to become aware of and transcend their biases, develop knowledge and skills to relate effectively with and represent others, *and* adhere to current norms.

The data also showed support for a contributing factor of cultural competence found in the first phase of the research: Students' awareness of and the ability to negotiate one's status as an "insider" or "outsider." This is a particularly complicated skill for community journalists, who increasingly communicate not only locally but also globally through digital technologies. Other themes gathered through surveys, interviews, and participant observation provided empirical support for dimensions of cultural competence identified in previous research and models, i.e., awareness, knowledge and skills that influence the process of an individual becoming more or less culturally competent. The student reporters in this study demonstrated varying degrees of cultural awareness and communication skills, according to the data, but seemed to be lacking in micro-level and macro-level knowledge of neighborhoods and their cultures. Not surprisingly, a lack of any of the previously identified dimensions of cultural competence was a hindrance to a culturally competent approach to community reporting.

Evidence of the social construction of reality, schema, and attribution was revealed particularly in relation to expressed stereotypes or communication miscues with sources. The finding about students' over-reliance on journalistic norms to represent the neighborhoods also demonstrated evidence of social construction of reality and schema. Community journalists need to go further to become aware of their own group schema, role schema, and news schema to avoid falling into biases created by abstracted, constructed expectations that are not based on experience with members of the group. A table identifying the factors that contribute to or hinder the process of a culturally competent approach to community journalism is in Appendix 2.

The findings can help journalism educators incorporate cultural competence in their curricula. Journalism educators for decades have embraced a pedagogical approach that acknowledges that students learn by "doing," or by actually reporting, and also through theories and concepts relevant to journalism that they learn in the classroom (Folkerts, 2014). While it is likely the case that some of the awareness, knowledge and skills associated with cultural competence were learned by the students as they reported in the neighborhoods, journalism education clearly has a role in encouraging students to take a culturally competent approach to community journalism. For example, professors could place an emphasis on the macro-level aspects of culture, such as the historical and structural contexts of communities, because students seemed to be lacking in this area of knowledge. Micro-level knowledge of a community could be taught through an overview of the concept of culture. Awareness of students' own biases and perceptions and their knowledge of culture and cultural perceptions—not just skills—also could be taught to future community journalists. In the case of the important journalistic skill of listening, for example, a culturally competent approach would ask students not to just listen to their sources, but to first examine their own perspectives so that they could *take those perspectives into account* while listening to someone else, and then try to remove their own filters as the person is speaking.

Future Research and Limitations

This study focused on student community reporters in one multimedia lab in one U.S. city. Future research could focus on student and professional reporters in multiple settings and in multiple countries and cultures. Additional research also could be conducted to assess how an individual's cultural background influences one's position on the cultural competence continuum. This would allow further investigation into issues of negotiating "insider" and "outside" status.

An important area of future research would be a close examination of the news texts produced by the students who indicated a culturally competent approach to journalism, according to the data produced in this phase of the study. While news sources and neighborhood representatives reviewed the students' texts for this study, a closer examination seeking evidence of cultural competence in the news texts could reveal important information about how community reporters can move toward a more culturally competent approach to journalism.

This study helps to provide new significance for what it means to be a community journalist. A community journalist in today's world needs to be able to transcend his or her cultural perspectives and dwell in the borderlands, occupying liminal spaces as neither an "insider" or an "outsider" and promoting a new norm of *understanding*, both of ourselves and others.

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Appendix 1

Proposed Operational Definition of Dimensions and Potential Factors Influencing the Cultural Competence of Community Journalists

Awareness of One's Own Cultural Perspectives	Knowledge of Culture and Cultural Perspectives	Skills and Attributes to Effectively and Appropriately Communicate, Interact with and Represent a Variety of Cultures
<p>Awareness of one's own position, cultural perspectives, and biases, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding by the student community journalists that they were raised in a particular culture with a language, history, power and economic relations with other countries, and particular beliefs and values • Understanding by the student community journalists of their more specific, individual cultural influences, which are related to socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, education level, religion, age, political ideology, and geography 	<p>Knowledge of macro aspects of culture and particular cultures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge that cultures are broadly defined, complex and continually changing • Knowledge of particular cultures' history, political, economic, and political structures, and specific beliefs and values • Knowledge of local language(s) <p>Knowledge of micro aspects of culture and particular cultures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the nuances of cultures, including its cultural cues, variation of behaviors and beliefs of individuals within particular cultures, and understanding that individuals have multiple identities 	<p>Being able to communicate effectively and appropriately with culturally diverse news sources, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending and receiving of messages appropriately and effectively—assessed through the clarity of verbal and nonverbal communication with sources, a lack of communication miscues with sources, and listening • Demonstrating attributes and skills such as empathy, respect and nonjudgment of people from different cultures. Communication skills and attributes include being open-minded, adaptive, and able to obtain and reflect multiple and diverse perspectives • Maintaining a questioning approach with news sources, including in regard to

within cultures

cultural perspectives

- Seeking out a news sources from a variety of cultural backgrounds
- Negotiating “outsider” status, such as gaining access to “insider” sources or using the advantages of being an “insider”

Producing news texts in a way that represents the complexities of cultures and communities for a mass media audience, including:

- Creating news texts that avoid stereotypes and that provide context for the way in which people make sense of their lives
 - Producing news stories in ways that acknowledge the perspective(s) offered ultimately reflect a partial truth
 - Producing a wide variety of stories
 - Producing news texts that express the news sources’ perspectives
-

Appendix 2

*Contributing and Hindering Factors of a Culturally Competent Approach to Community Journalism**

Use of Journalistic Ethics, Norms, and Routines	
Contributors to Cultural Competence	Hindrances to Cultural Competence
Relying on journalistic ethics, norms, and routines, such as striving for an objective approach, which helps to remove community reporters from their cultural positions	Over-relying on journalistic ethics, norms, and routines such as objectivity and accuracy without the thoughtfulness that goes into becoming aware of one's position and perception of the world, then having the willingness, if necessary, to challenge one's attitudes and beliefs

Ability to Negotiate an "Insider" or "Outsider" Status	
Contributors to Cultural Competence	Hindrances to Cultural Competence
Being able to negotiate "outsider" status Gaining access to "insider" sources who could help move the journalist closer to an "insider" status. Using the advantages of being an "insider"	Not being able to negotiate "outsider" status Not making use of the advantages of being an "insider"

Awareness of Culture and Self	
Contributors to Cultural Competence	Hindrances to Cultural Competence
Having an awareness of the importance of culture and one's position, cultural perspectives, and biases	Lacking awareness of the importance of culture and one's own position, cultural perspectives, and biases

Knowledge of Other Cultures and Cultural Perspectives

<u>Contributors to Cultural Competence</u>	<u>Hindrances to Cultural Competence</u>
Developing a macro knowledge, such as understanding of the complexity of culture and understanding particular cultures' historical, political, and socioeconomic context	Lacking macro knowledge, such as the complexity of culture and particular cultures' historical, political, and socioeconomic context
Developing micro knowledge, such as recognizing nuances, contradictions, and various perspectives within particular cultures, as well as grasping similarities <i>and</i> differences within the culture and among various cultures	Lacking micro knowledge and understanding and representing particular cultures in oversimplified and stereotypical ways

Skills to Interact With and Represent a Variety of Cultures

<u>Contributors to Cultural Competence</u>	<u>Hindrances to Cultural Competence</u>
Demonstrating skills and attributes such as an ability to listen, as well as open-mindedness, respect, nonjudgment of people from different cultures, and a lack of communication miscues	Lacking the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with culturally diverse news sources

* It is important to note that some elements within the factors that influence cultural competence overlap. For example, skills that influence knowledge of the “Other,” such as effective communication, also can be listed as a skill to interact with and represent a variety of cultures or used to negotiate an “outsider” status in the community. In these cases, a decision was made to include an element within the factor in which it operated most strongly or where it seemed most appropriate.