One Journalist, Two Roles: What Happens When Journalists Work as Media Coordinators?

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One Journalist, Two Roles

What happens when journalists work as media coordinators?

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Abstract

Individuals interacting with society possess multiple roles, and yet the study of journalistic role conceptions, based on the assumption that role conceptions influence journalistic outputs, has not addressed the idea that journalists possess multiple roles inside and outside the journalistic field. A peculiar arrangement in Missouri is the appointment of journalists to serve as media coordinators for the courts. Using a symbolic interactionism framework, we explore how media coordinators experience this duality of roles.

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Introduction

It is the role of journalists in a democratic society to keep people informed by providing them accurate and complete information about public affairs. This role is best fulfilled when journalists enjoy autonomy, which allows them to report without fear or favor. With that in mind, we were intrigued when we first learned of the phenomenon of media coordination in Missouri, where the Supreme Court appoints journalists to serve the courts. Coordinating media coverage with public officials, we thought, was a function traditionally performed by public information officers—salaried government employees. After all, Schudson (2003) distinguished journalists from what he called parajournalists, referring to “public relations firms, public information officers, political spin doctors, and the publicity staffs of a wide variety of institutions, both corporate and non-profit” (p. 3). All of this made us wonder: When the demands of journalism conflict with those of the court, where do the media coordinators stand?

Understanding how the judicial system operates, and how it regulates media access to courtrooms, is increasingly important. For the press to bear witness to what happens in the law is as much an obligation as an opportunity. The idea is that most people cannot get for themselves the information they need to be informed and to participate in the political process. They have to rely on the press. In the judicial system, the press is the primary link between the judges and the public. It is not an easy role to play or place to be, because legal reporters, perhaps more so than other reporters, operate under the threat of immediate sanctions from the people and institutions they cover. On many beats, for example, a misstep might mean simply that a source would blacklist a reporter. On the legal beat, a misstep might mean that a judge would hold a reporter in contempt of court.

In the last 30 years, several states have opened their courts to cameras, allowing the press to record and broadcast judicial proceedings (Abrams & Kaminer, 1995; Chance, 1995). The
U.S. Supreme Court itself, however, does not allow cameras inside the hearing room (Ott, 1980). States that allow cameras have also limited their use (e.g., restrictions on the type of equipment that can be used). If a reporter does not comply with those limitations, then a judge could sanction her. Many courts employ a press officer to help reporters navigate the rules and gather the information they need. The officer’s responsibilities range from advising and credentialing reporters to advising judges on press matters. Some courts also appoint an outside media coordinator to oversee camera coverage. In Missouri, the media coordinator is not an employee of the court but a journalist who coordinates requests from fellow reporters to cover court events. Sometimes, the media coordinator covers the hearing she is coordinating.

Appointed by judges, media coordinators in Missouri are responsible for ensuring that the expectations of courtroom decorum are met, for credentialing reporters, for overseeing the use and location of media equipment in the courtroom, and for making all pooling arrangements. What sets them apart from reporters covering the courts, or judges fulfilling their official responsibilities, is that the coordinators play a dual role. They coordinate media coverage and communicate to the court the interests of their fellow reporters, and they help the court regulate press activities. Each of those roles is important, so it is valuable to understand how the media coordinators manage and negotiate the roles together.

**Literature Review**

The study of roles is a widely researched area in sociology that is marked by some confusion (Biddle, 1986). Role theory includes a triad of main concepts: “patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68). From those concepts emerged numerous conceptualizations of what constitutes a role. A point of agreement is that roles are negotiations between perceptions of
individual and social expectations (Biddle, 1986; Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988; Thoits, 1991). A role is “a composite of occupational tasks and purposes that is widely recognizable and has a stable and enduring form” (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009, p. 119). Therefore, there is no such thing as a self-conceived role, because a role is always a negotiation between personal expectations and a perception of social expectations.

Biddle (1986) identified five perspectives in role theory research: functional, structural, organizational, cognitive, and symbolic interactionist. We adopted the symbolic interactionist perspective that conceptualizes roles as “norms, attitudes, contextual demands, negotiation, and the evolving definition of the situation as understood by the actors” (Biddle, 1986, p. 71). This definition is consistent with the symbolic interactionism theory of human communication, which focuses on meanings and experiences derived from social interactions mediated by socially agreed symbols (Littlejohn, 1992). Thus, in contrast to functional or structural approaches, an interactionist theory focuses on the “individual’s experience of conflicting expectations, not simply the existence of structure” (Stryker & Macke, 1978, p. 71). It grants agency to individuals who must negotiate multiple, and usually conflicting, norms and expectations inside and outside the self (see Biddle, 1986; Hicks, 2008; Stryker & Macke, 1978).

**Role Strain**

Individuals interacting with society do not embrace only one role. Thus, having multiple roles and a limited set of resources (e.g., time in the day) lead to difficulties in complying with some roles—what Goode (1960) called “role strain.” It refers to “difficulty in meeting given role demands” (Goode, 1960, p. 485). In general, individuals seek to minimize role strain by choosing whether to enter or leave a role relationship and by engaging in role bargaining or by weighing the price of a role performance (Goode, 1960). Some strategies to minimize role strain
include compartmentalization or delegation (Goode, 1960). The concept of role strain incorporates two problems: role overload, when a role’s demands exceed time allocations; and role conflict, when one role requires prioritization over another (Sieber, 1974). These apply to media coordinators who also work as journalists, because they balance their dual occupational roles within a limited amount of time, and one role might require prioritization over the other.

The concept of role strain has been studied in the context of multiple roles of mothers (e.g. Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Campbell & Moen, 1992; Claesson & Brice, 1989; Lois, 2006) and university researchers (e.g. Boardman & Bozeman, 2007; Evan, 1962). Women have multiple roles of being wives, mothers, and workers. University researchers need to balance basic and applied research. A survey of single mothers found that role strain was related to working hours (role as a worker) and number of children (role as a mother) (Campbell & Moen, 1992). University researchers also experienced role strain arising out of the research they want to do and the research they actually were doing (Evan, 1962).

In a study of mothers homeschooling their children, Lois (2006) found that the coping strategies Goode (1960) outlined influenced the experience of dual roles. Mothers who compartmentalized their roles experienced more burnout (Lois, 2006). However, mothers managed to cope with role strain by using strategies like delegation (assigning some tasks to their husbands) and role integration (using a less-structured approach in teaching their own children). A survey of 238 women, however, found that having multiple roles was a prerequisite not for role strain but for wellbeing (Baruch & Barnett, 1986).

**Role Accumulation**

Sieber (1974) argued that the concept of role strain presupposes that having multiple roles is stressful, failing to consider that it could also be gratifying. Sieber (1974) classified four
types of positive outcomes from having multiple roles, known as role accumulation: enjoying role privileges, overall status security, access to resources for status enhancement and role performance (e.g., networking with the elite), and enrichment of the personality and ego gratification. In many instances, individuals seek role accumulation. For example, the move toward gender equality called for women to receive a full range of role opportunities in a traditionally male-dominated society, according to Sieber (1974).

An interview with 18 teacher-mothers found that their dual roles as mothers and teachers were complementary, resulting in a “net gain” because they were able to cope with role strain (Claesson & Brice, 1989). Hicks (2008) also found that prison chaplains mitigated role strain from their religious and correctional roles by engaging in “role fusion.” This concept recognizes that individuals cannot always isolate their roles. “Role fusion is an important mode of adaptation because the compartmentalization, deflection, or abandonment of roles is not always available to individuals as a strategy for dealing with strain” (Hicks, 2008, p. 416). This is consistent with role accumulation.

These theoretical assumptions clarify the experience of having multiple roles, and yet it remains unclear whether role strain or accumulation occurs when individuals possess multiple roles or whether there are role characteristics that allow or inhibit strain or accumulation. For example, a journalistic role is bounded by normative expectations that privilege autonomy. A journalist playing another role might experience that role based on normative expectations of his journalistic role, resulting in conflict. Studies have compartmentalized individuals with multiple roles as if they experience either role strain or accumulation, even if they recognize that a multitude of factors, some situational, influence those experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**
While they are often presented as contradictory, we can locate role strain and role accumulation on a continuum of role valence: the former is a negative experience, and the latter is a positive experience. How individuals respond to their experience requires a parallel conceptualization. Goode (1960) talked about compartmentalization as a response strategy to cope with role strain. This is similar to role segmentation, as opposed to role integration (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Segmentation occurs when there are huge differences between roles, meaning the roles are “mutually exclusive and perhaps even antithetical,” while integration occurs when there are no differences (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 477). While many studies classify individuals into one or the other, segmentation and integration are located on a continuum—complete segmentation or integration is rare (Ashforth et al., 2000). Unaddressed in these conceptualizations is what determines whether roles are segmented or integrated. Are some roles inherently easier to demarcate? Do some naturally come together? Or does it depend on how individuals internalize roles?

In summary, role theory conceptualizes role identities as fluid and susceptible not only to norms but also to personal and social expectations. When individuals embrace multiple roles, their experiences vary—from pleasant to problematic and from clearly demarcated roles to fused roles. What we propose is a move away from dichotomizing the experiences of multiple roles and instead viewing the experiences on a continuum that depends on situational factors (see Figure 1).

**Journalistic Role Conceptions**

It is not surprising that the study of roles is an important area in journalism research. Efforts to account for influences on news take into account the various role conceptions of journalists (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The role conceptions of
journalists are assumed to influence their outputs. For instance, Donsbach (2008) argued that research on journalistic role conceptions “assumes that the way journalists understand their role will influence considerably the way they interact with sources and make decisions about news selection and presentation” (p. 2605).

What makes this salient among journalists is how role conception might not translate to the corresponding role enactment, because news content goes through numerous channels before publication (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2012). This is the basis of gatekeeping theory: events transform into bits of information that must pass through numerous gates, where gatekeepers decide whether they will make it to the next gate, until they become news items and get published (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). A multitude of factors—from individual, routine, organizational, socio-institutional and social-system levels—influence those gates and gatekeepers. Though many studies have explored role conceptions of journalists (see for instance Hanitzsch, 2009, 2011; Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996), role enactment is an underexplored area (e.g. Tandoc et al., 2012).

Initial work on journalistic role conceptions discussed a dichotomy of roles. Janowitz (1975) talked about the gatekeeper role, which emphasizes objectivity by separating facts from opinions, and the advocate role, which requires journalists to “participate” in the process as an advocate for the powerless. This is similar to Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman’s (1976) dichotomy of a neutral or participant journalist. The most-cited typology of journalistic role conceptions, however, was that of Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, 1996). They identified four journalistic roles: disseminator, interpretive, adversarial and mobilizer. The disseminator role is similar to the neutral journalist; the interpretive role refers to a journalist’s
function of providing analysis and interpretation; the *adversarial* role refers to being adversaries of government and business; and the *mobilizer* role values the opinions of ordinary citizens (Weaver et al., 2007).

Journalists can have multiple journalistic roles (Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996), but how they manage those roles is an underexplored area. It is possible that their journalistic roles exist in a hierarchy. For instance, the disseminator role could be conceived as a gateway role that leads to other journalistic roles. But role theory also suggests that people have multiple roles in multiple fields (Goode, 1960; Sieber, 1974). For instance, a woman can have the dual role of being a mother and a wife within the family, as well as a manager and subordinate within the workforce. This is true with journalists, too, who have to juggle their journalistic role conceptions with their other roles as family members, citizens, volunteers, and so on. In the Missouri courts, media coordinators have dual occupational roles.

**Media Coordinators and their Dual Roles**

We explored the phenomenon of media coordination in Missouri: the work of reporters who serve as media coordinators for the courts. These people are accountable to their newsrooms and to the courts. They serve as liaisons between their fellow reporters and the court, and they credential reporters and negotiate their access to proceedings. In their dual roles, the media coordinators could be on a continuum of defining their experience as positive or negative, reporting either role strain or accumulation. Since roles are understood as both a conception and an enactment, media coordinators enact their dual roles in particular ways. For these reasons, we ask the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How do media coordinators define their roles?

**RQ2.** How do media coordinators experience their dual roles?
RQ3. How do media coordinators enact their dual roles?

**Methodology**

We are journalism researchers, exploring a phenomenon in the field, but we are also journalists, interacting with people whose work is familiar to us. Therefore, we began this research by reflecting on our own roles, backgrounds, and assumptions—a process known as *reflexivity* (Brennen, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2010; Tracy, 2013). This refers to “the self-aware analysis of the dynamics between the researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field, and the way in which the researcher’s positioning impacts on the research process” (Gobo, 2011, p. 22). Engaging in this process made us aware of our assumptions and enabled us to be careful not to impose our normative beliefs on how we interpreted our data from the two methods we used.

**Interviews**

We conducted *respondent interviews* (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010) with nine media coordinators and five reporters who interact with media coordinators. Seven of the interviews were conducted in person, while the rest were by phone (the media coordinators are based all around Missouri). The average interview lasted 45 minutes. Journalists are a peculiar group for interviews. They are accustomed to interviewing instead of being interviewed, and they tend to be pressed for time. Committing them to a long interview was a challenge, as many studies based on interviews with journalists have established (Attfield & Dowell, 2003; Besley & Roberts, 2009; Plesner, 2011).

Because we made promises of anonymity to the interviewees, they are identified in our paper by pseudonyms from an online list of the most common names in the United States (see Tables 1 and 2). We used criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007) to choose our participants. We excluded media coordinators who are not reporters, and we excluded reporters who have not
interacted with media coordinators. We relied on a list of 43 media coordinators available on the Missouri Supreme Court’s website.

Although a media coordinator typically serves an entire circuit, according to Missouri’s Court Operating Rule 16, it is possible for a coordinator to serve a single court, a portion of a circuit, or more than one circuit. Our sample included each type of coordinator. Rule 16 recommends that each coordinator designate one or more alternates to serve in the event the coordinator is not available. We did not interview alternates—we focused on the duly appointed coordinators. We employed semi-structured or partially structured interviews, in which the interview guide contains standardized questions, but the interviewer is free to deviate and ask follow-up questions (e.g. Plooy, 2004).

Observation

We observed two court proceedings where a media coordinator interacted with reporters. In both instances, we started our observations an hour before the hearing so we could observe the media coordinator enact his role as he gathered with journalists outside the court. We also observed their interactions inside the court—before, during and after the proceedings. In addition, we observed a media coordinator at his desk—in his newsroom—as he sifted through his email. He talked with us informally about the open-courts movement and his experience as a media coordinator. We took fieldnotes to capture routines, dialogues and interactions.

Throughout our fieldwork, we adopted the “observer as participant” stance (Gold, 1958). As we shadowed our participants, we made our roles as researchers explicit to them. They knew we were observing. Still, we developed a good rapport with most of our participants. One of them gave us a tour of his company’s building and offered to help us arrange an interview with an elusive target participant. Another invited us to his office to provide copies of forms he uses to coordinate court coverage. However, the limited occasions when we could observe them in
action—our fieldwork was at the mercy of the courts’ docket—also limited the opportunity for us to go native. At any rate, from our jottings and raw notes, we wrote formal fieldnotes (a total of 25 double-spaced pages), which we used in our analysis.

**Analysis**

In this study, we are guided by the symbolic interactionist role theory and by the framework we derived from the concepts of role strain and role accumulation. To analyze our qualitative data, from both our interviews and field observations, we employed the constant comparative approach, a common analytical strategy in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1965). Qualitative scholars have adapted the analytical strategy for studies not based on grounded theory. Tracy (2013) defined the constant comparative approach as “a method of analysis used to compare data applicable to each code and to modify code definitions so as to fit new data” (p. 202). The advantage of the constant comparative method is its disciplined and systematic approach to analyzing data (Glaser, 1965; Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). First, we conducted primary-cycle coding, individually coding the data line by line. This is similar to the process of open-coding (Saldaña, 2009; Tracy, 2013). Second, we proceeded to secondary-cycle coding, again working individually, to categorize the first-level codes that emerged. This is the process of axial coding, and in this stage we were guided by sensitizing concepts based on our theoretical framework (Saldaña, 2009; Tracy, 2013). Third, we discussed the axial codes that emerged from our individual analyses to develop the themes, guided by our research questions. We discuss these themes in the following section.

**Role Conceptions**

We begin by exploring how media coordinators defined their roles as media coordinators. On the surface, they described their roles using similar phrases: as “go-betweens,” “facilitators,” and “liaisons.” Being a media coordinator is unpaid work. In most cases, the journalists are
asked by the courts to volunteer for the job, or they are volunteered by their news organizations. From the responses, two role conceptions emerged: being advocates for journalists and being officers of the court.

**Advocates for Journalists**

Some coordinators see themselves as advocates for media access to Missouri courts. They recognize the journalistic value of cameras in the courtroom. Thus, having journalists as media coordinators can safeguard that access. The role here is to ensure that media access to courtrooms is maintained by keeping the system orderly and efficient. When the court leaves it to the coordinators to decide who gets into the courtroom, the coordinators celebrate this as a degree of autonomy. An important structure that explains this role conception is the other role that coordinators play. They are also journalists. Their conceptions of their role as coordinators are influenced by their role as journalists interested in access to courtrooms. The journalists who interact with the coordinators perceive this connection, too. They recognize that the coordinators understand media routines, so working with them can save the journalists time and resources.

For example, TV reporter Scott Jones recalled a time when a few broadcasters recorded stand-up shots outside the court building, inadvertently capturing on camera a number of jurors as they exited the building. The media coordinator understood that broadcasters needed to shoot their stand-ups, but the jury needed to be walked out of the building without being recorded:

[The coordinator would tell us], “Well, let me go talk to the bailiffs, so the bailiffs can tell me where they think they’ll take the jury out of the courthouse.” And the bailiffs might say, “Well, we always exit from the east side of the courthouse.” [Then, the coordinator would say], “Okay, then, I am going to try to tell my media people to do all our stand-ups on the west side of the courthouse.”

**Officers of the Court**

Media coordinators also see their role as working for the court, facilitating requests for court coverage so judges need not bother themselves with such requests. Some coordinators even considered themselves officers of the court. As such, they are bound by the rules of the court. For
example, David Moore said: “I’m an officer of the court, just like an attorney, although I am not an attorney. Still, it’s the judge’s courtroom, and the judges and the court marshals tell you what to do.” This role conception is explained by the rules that govern their media coordinator role. Journalists recognize this degree of authority exercised by the coordinators. TV reporter Drew Ford said the coordinators tutor journalists in the rules, explaining them by email and in person. On one particular occasion, Ford said the coordinator spoke to a group of journalists before a proceeding began, and he acted as part educator, part enforcer:

We were all sitting in the jury box, where they put us for the motion hearings, and [the media coordinator] stood in front of us and said, “You shouldn’t have anything on you, but if you do, leave.” He kind of went over the rules again. He was like, “If anyone has problem with this, well, you got to leave.”

Role Experiences

Those dual role conceptions—media coordinator and journalist—are seldom seen as mutually exclusive. This leads to both positive and negative experiences, as foreshadowed by our conceptual framework.

Positive Experiences

Relationships. The media coordinators experienced positive relationships in general, although they sounded more confident about their interactions with court officials than with journalists. For example, Mark Johnson said:

I, through this position, have gotten to know judges on a first-name basis. We are not friends, we are not moving in the same social circles, anything like that, but I have gotten to know these judges. I think that most of them trust me as a guy who has integrity and a guy who will make decisions that not everybody will agree with but generally are the fairest decisions that could be made.

The coordinators were not as explicit when asked to describe their relationships with their fellow journalists. Lisa Harris described her relationship with journalists as “neutral.” Kevin Adams said journalists had to be reminded of the rules, a practice he described as the hardest part of his job. Michael Walker thought he had good relationships with his fellow journalists: “I
think my relationship has been very good. They (journalists) may tell you something different, but I think mine has been very good.”

**Role benefits.** The media coordinators all recognized the benefits that come with being a media coordinator: 1) to themselves, 2) to their organizations, 3) to the journalism industry, and 4) to the court. The benefits influence how they view their roles. A few coordinators saw their role as educational, because it allows them to learn more about the judicial system. Johnson also said that being a coordinator has benefitted him in his role as a newspaper editor:

> I think just being connected to the courts to a certain extent, you do become more knowledgeable as to how they operate, some of the nuts and bolts of the proceedings that go on. In addition, you become familiar with judges who have divergent personalities and various demeanors…If you know a judge is a stickler for the letter of the law, and for following procedures to the nth degree, then you can advise your reporter to do things right.

A few of the coordinators recognized the benefit to their organizations. Linda Taylor said that when she was asked to be a coordinator, she cleared it first with the editors at her news outlet. She said the editors approved in part because they considered the position beneficial to the organization and to the industry. For Moore, his editors volunteered him for the position because of the benefits, which they all acknowledged:

> [We have been discussing that] since no one is paying you to do this, and it sometimes interferes with your real job, why are you doing this? And we’ve decided in the long run, being media coordinator helps keep the newspapers relationship with the court on a good, friendly, cooperative basis. So there’s so much in it that winds up being PR between the paper and the courts.

There is also the benefit to the industry, insofar as the media coordinators ensure access to courtrooms. Finally, for a few coordinators, designating a journalist as a coordinator, rather than a salaried court employee, is advantageous for the court, which needs to educate people about reporting procedures and routines. For example, Harris said:

> I understand what another reporter needs. So I can ask certain questions to the judge or I can help facilitate the judge’s request. For example, a judge may decide to let you in, and he or she may say, “You can come in. You need to set up in one particular spot; we don’t want to you move around. You can put your microphone on my desk. Don’t show the jury. And if you decide to leave my courtroom in the middle of testimony, I am not letting you back in.” So I can explain to another reporter exactly what that judge is meaning by that. They don’t want the courtroom to be disrupted…I just think it makes it easier because I
have a better understanding of what other journalists are looking for as opposed to a court employee who may only know about what they read in the paper or what they see on TV, as far as local news operation works.

**Power.** The media coordinators all put themselves in the ambit of the court’s power.

The basic reason the coordinator position exists is to relieve the court of the responsibility to handle media requests. In one sense, this takes the court off the front lines of media coverage, but some coordinators, in turn, feel a sense of autonomy from the court, a sense of power. For example, Moore said:

> There is some benefit to my being independent. I don’t go into the courthouse to talk to the judges as an employee of the courthouse over whom they have control. The only control they have over me is to say yes or no, or we don’t want you to do the job anymore. So there is some benefit in having someone independent do it.

Some coordinators experience power over their fellow journalists, although they did not admit to exercising it, and some were clear about their responsibilities. For example, Moore said that even though he has worked for print, radio and television, he is not technologically savvy. Thus, he absolves himself of any responsibility to fix equipment for journalists in the courtroom. It is also not his job to alert the journalists to upcoming cases, he said, because journalists should be aware of what is coming down the pipeline. Notably, the coordinator position allows the coordinators to skip one of the gatekeeping layers that the other journalists must pass through. For example, Adams said:

> When I see the docket come out, I take a look and make a decision about what we’re going to cover, and then I can send a message to (the court) directly, instead of going through a media coordinator, instead of going through a coordinator like me. I am the coordinator, myself. Everyone else has to go through me, through an extra layer. I guess I cut out my own middleman.

Power also manifests in the most trivial of things. As we were arranging a field observation with Scott Jones, a reporter, he sent us emails from the coordinator responsible for that circuit. The emails outlined rules, including not bringing a cellphone inside the court building. Jones repeated that admonition in emails to us. During the court hearing, we observed that all the journalists complied with the rule. In contrast, the coordinator brought his cellphone
inside the court building. He left it in the judge’s chambers and used it inside the courtroom when the proceeding ended. He walked freely throughout the building, outside the metal detectors where journalists and others had to pass through.

**Negative Experiences**

**Conflict between stability and flexibility.** Court Operating Rule 16 governs camera use in Missouri courts. It also sets forth the responsibilities of media coordinators, who adhere to the rules as a way to maintain stability. The principle of stability is an underlying structure of the judicial system. Courts are bound by previous decisions. This principle is implicated in the invocation of court rules that govern the coordinator function. It is also present in the selection of media coordinators. The court appoints journalists who have stable jobs and have been living in the community for a long time (turnover would require the court to train a new coordinator). The coordinators themselves also value stability. They may disagree with certain rules but always defer to them. And yet the coordinators seek flexibility in the rules in response to changing technologies. An example is the use of Twitter in courtrooms. One coordinator, Ronald Thomas, believes Twitter use should be allowed because it is not disallowed by Rule 16. The presiding judges, however, believe Rule 16 should be rewritten before they can allow it. Thomas’ recourse is to advocate for the inclusion of Twitter use in the ongoing attempts to revise Rule 16. This represents a desire for flexibility that complements the principle of stability.

**Conflicting interests.** Media coordinators experience conflicting interests. On the one hand, they serve the interests of journalism by protecting and lobbying for access. On the other hand, they serve the interests of the court by enforcing the rules and policing members of the media. This experience is salient for the experienced coordinators—those who have served for a long period of time and have coordinated numerous court events. Those aspects of their
experience—length of service and frequency of performing the role—influence how they experienced conflicting interests by breeding familiarity and intimate knowledge of their roles.

An example that illustrates these conflicting interests was an incident involving a student-journalist who took pictures of the jury, in violation of the rules. The judge ordered her to come to the bench, threw her out of the courtroom, and wanted to issue an arrest warrant against her. The judge called Thomas, asking what punishment should be given to the student-journalist who was not aware of the rules. Thomas said:

I was torn at that point between being frustrated because the student journalist put all our access in danger, you know, and she was doing it for a grade, and we were doing it every day for our public... But then, you know, the journalists said, “Well, she was acting on instinct; she was a journalist.” I can’t be too critical about that. This is an education issue. So that is the kind of tension between understanding why the court enforces this rule the way it does and wanting to give people a break when they are trying to do their job.

**Conflicting demands.** Aside from conflicting interests arising from their dual roles, media coordinators also experience conflicting demands. This was salient for the coordinators who had to cover the same court events they coordinated. For example, Moore was not able to write stories once when he was coordinating a big proceeding. His newspaper had to use wire stories about it, even though Moore was in the courtroom. Still, Moore did not blame his coordinator position. Instead, he blamed the demands of his role as a journalist, because other big events were unfolding on his beat covering the legislature. Moore said:

It wasn’t the media coordinator job that got in the way. It was my real job as a reporter that got in the way, and reporters have to deal with that all the time. Not just court stuff, but there may be three hearings for the legislature going on at the same time that I’m trying to cover.

There are other coordinators who say they get to play their roles at separate times. Adams, a coordinator and radio reporter, said one role ends when the other begins. Playing two roles is not difficult for him, he said:

As a radio person, I just go in and plug my recorder into the box to get the audio feed, and the coordinator’s work is pretty much done before the hearing begins. I’m the one who decides who’s going to be the pool, and all of the other stuff, and once I make those decisions and I’ve made it to the courtroom, I’m pretty much done. I might have to find a member of the court’s technical staff, if we have a problem with the feed coming out of the courtroom, something like that, and I’ll do that. But again by the time the hearing starts,
everything is done, and everyone is in place doing what they’re supposed to be doing. So I just sit down and cover the hearing.

The experiences of conflicting demands among media coordinators can be explained by the nature of their other role as journalists. First, some of the coordinators cover the events they coordinate, and that can produce conflicting demands. The coordinators usually need to ensure that everyone else is set up before setting up their own equipment to cover the proceeding. Second, most of the veteran coordinators are from newspapers, and their distance from the broadcast industry can minimize any perceived bias in their pool-camera selections. Thomas, a newspaper editor, believes the court considered that point when it offered him the coordinator position:

Television uses Rule 16 and uses the ability to have cameras in the courtroom more than anybody. So, to have a TV person holding the position was causing a little friction among the broadcasters. To put it in the newspaper guy’s hands, I think, was a way to get away from that friction and create the appearance of less bias.

**Role Enactment**

The coordinators’ enactment of their roles can be understood by considering how they resolve the conflicts they experience. Their conflict-resolution strategies include role segmentation, reliance on the rules, and exercising power. The processes themselves do not vary among the coordinators, but how the processes are enacted can vary. For example, role segmentation might lead one coordinator to prioritize her journalistic role and another to prioritize his coordinator role.

**Role segmentation.** Though media coordinators conceive two roles embedded in their role as coordinators, and they maintain their roles as journalists, they navigate their coordinator role distinctly from their journalist role. For example, Linda Taylor separated her roles in her responses. She would start her responses by saying “as a media coordinator” when referring to
her role as coordinator, and then “as a journalist” when referring to changes that should be made to the rules. Chris Robinson made the same distinction:

As a media coordinator, I am filing a request for cameras in the courtroom and making the arrangements. That’s not journalism. That’s an administrative function, almost a secretarial function. As a journalist, I am covering. I am making decisions about what’s newsworthy, about what to put on our station, or what to put on our website.

Segmentation for some coordinators, particularly those who assumed the role recently, leads to the perception of an absence of conflict, because they prioritize one role over the other. For example, Nancy Clark said:

I am more an advocate for the media than for the courts. We are all trying to help our own interest and, of course, the court officials are trying to do what’s best for the court. I am in a position of trying to argue the case for the media, so I don’t see any conflict there. If it comes down to that, my side is for the journalist.

Segmentation also leads to seeing the two roles as contradictory. For example, Johnson considers himself an officer of the court. When his roles and the interests they serve compete, he prioritizes his coordinator role over his journalistic role, to the point that he avoids editing news articles about court events he coordinates:

They do contradict each other because as a journalist, you are interested in the news and you are interested in your particular news outlet, getting the story first, providing the best coverage, and so on. However, as a media coordinator, I consider myself to be an officer of the court. I have been appointed and approved by [the court], and therefore I have a standard of objectivity, a standard of fairness that I need to adhere to…If there is a court case that the media is keenly interested in, I turn our newspaper coverage over to my subordinate editors and allow them to work the story, to edit the copy, so I don’t have any involvement in the story from a journalistic standpoint.

Reliance on rules. When talking about camera access to courtrooms, the coordinators all adopt the position of an advocate for journalists. They relate to the interests of their fellow journalists. They also stand to benefit from access to courtrooms. But some discussed the need to balance journalistic interests with those of the court (e.g., to do justice, to protect the defendant’s rights, to ensure the sanctity of the process). When journalistic and court interests compete, the coordinators defer to the rules that govern their role as coordinators. And they defer to the judge. For example, Robinson said:
I don’t always agree with the attorneys, and I don’t always agree with the judge’s decisions about whether to allow a camera in there. If we ask for cameras in the courtroom, we obviously think it’s newsworthy and that it’s something we should be allowed to cover, but the judges make a decision about the interest of justice. And there is sometimes conflict, but I am inclined to agree with the judges who are looking out for the best interest of that court case and that defendant.

Discussion

The experience of having dual roles is an experience of conflict. As journalists, media coordinators have their own routines to follow and articles to write or edit. As coordinators, journalists need to quarterback the news coverage of court events and maintain communication with the parties involved—lawyers, judges, and journalists. What is different, however, is how the coordinators perceive and resolve the experience of multiple responsibilities.

First, the experience depends on the nature of each role. For some media coordinators, coordinating coverage is not demanding, especially in courts where high-profile cases are rare. This allows them to prioritize their role as journalists. For coordinators who work on high-profile cases, the story is different. Some prioritize their role as coordinators, a role memorialized in a rule and backed by the institutional authority and ethos of a court. Journalistic roles tend to be more flexible, and they are neither memorialized in a rule nor backed by the institutional authority and ethos of a court. Second, the longer a coordinator serves, the more familiar she is with the demands of the role. That means the coordinator will experience less internal conflict than one who recently assumed the role. Finally, it is possible that individual differences influence the experience of managing multiple responsibilities arising out of multiple roles (e.g., the propensity to multi-task), an issue that future studies should explore.

The idea of role strain (Goode, 1960) assumes two problems that underlie multiple roles: role overload and role conflict (Siebert, 1974). Some of the media coordinators reported rarely experiencing both, although when we observed one of them, we saw how demanding coordinating and covering the same proceeding could be. What many experienced is role
conflict, particularly when they have to invoke the rules as media coordinators, rules they may dislike as journalists. A way to cope with role conflict is role integration (Goode, 1960; Lois, 2006).

However, all media coordinators considered their dual roles to be segmented. We argue that this is because of the norms governing their primary role as journalists, in which they value objectivity and protect their autonomy, even from their own conflicts. After all, the coordinators were journalists first before they were coordinators. An interesting area to explore in future research, to move forward our understanding of role conflict, is whether multiple roles are arranged on a hierarchy and whether a role’s position on an internal hierarchy influences how individuals experience and resolve role conflicts.

In our study, we looked only at an individual’s role of coordinating court coverage and working as a journalist. One preceded the other, because being a journalist was basically a prerequisite to selection as a media coordinator. We assume, therefore, that the norms associated with journalism apply to their navigation of their roles as coordinators. The roles are segmented, but they inform each other.

Most of the coordinators experienced more role accumulation than role strain. We see this in the stated benefits of their dual role: they complement each other, and having dual roles benefits their organizations, the journalism industry, and the court. This is consistent with what Sieber (1974) outlined as the four positive outcomes of role accumulation. First, having multiple roles allows for the enjoyment of role privileges. This could be as simple as not going through security when entering the courtroom, as we observed. Second, having multiple roles provides a sense of status security, because one role can serve as a buffer for the other. The journalistic role, in particular, can provide coordinators with a sense of security, as we observed. Third, having
multiple roles provides access to resources for status enhancement. This includes being around powerful people; for media coordinators, this might take the form of developing relationships with judges. Fourth, having multiple roles can lead to personality enrichment and ego gratification. Some coordinators described the job as educational, offering them intimate knowledge of how a powerful institution works.

This does not mean media coordinators did not experience role strain. But we believe the experience of dual roles cannot be compartmentalized into either role strain or role accumulation. The experience of dual roles lies on a continuum from strain to accumulation, and because experience is fluid, depending on the changing demands and nature of each role, where one lies on the continuum can change. The experience might also depend on how individuals navigate their roles and whether they seek to integrate them or treat them as segmented, consistent with the norms governing at least one of the roles. What we found in the experience of media coordinators is that role integration could be impeded by the norms that govern one of the roles, such as the journalistic one. As we discussed, the norm of journalistic autonomy could explain why so many coordinators navigated their dual roles in a segmented way. But segmentation does not preclude role conflict.

A limitation in our analysis is our focus on dual roles, when role theory assumes a multiplicity of roles. However, we believe our focus on two seemingly contradictory roles presented an otherwise taken-for-granted analysis of situational and contextual factors that influence the experience of dual roles. A journalist's routine is usually flexible. A media coordinator’s routine is at the court’s mercy and governed by stable, inflexible rules. Thus, the experience of dual roles as a media coordinator is a negotiation between the two.

**Implications**
In this study, we found that the media coordinator system works well in Missouri. Courts designate mostly journalists to coordinate media requests to cover court proceedings. The coordinators experience a measure of power in that role, while at the same time preserving their journalistic autonomy and enforcing the rules. The system works well for the coordinators. And it works well for the journalists, too, who said it is the coordinators’ role to protect access to the courts, in part by relying on their journalistic experience. Because the media coordinator system is not widespread, it could serve as a model for other court systems that seek to streamline and organize media requests to cover court proceedings. By appointing an experienced journalist to manage such requests, and by requiring the coordinator to follow certain rules, the court honors the value of transparency without compromising its authority.

Going back to our biases that we sought to bracket out throughout the analysis, in this study we gained an understanding of the peculiar nature of the coordinator role, which is indeed not a public relations job but is viewed as a form of advocacy for media access. An interesting finding is that while the coordinator job is perceived as parallel with the interests of journalism, the coordinators navigated their dual roles as segmented.

Theoretically, we hope to contribute to the understanding of role theory. We live in a society where individuals assume multiple roles. Through our use of an interactionist framework, we move away from static and structuralist conceptions of multiple roles. A person does not fall on either extreme but on a continuum of strain and accumulation. The meanings a person attaches to particular roles, the nature of each role in question, the context that enables or limits particular coping mechanisms, the interaction between the roles—each of these influences the experience of dual roles.
References


Note. We cross multiple-roles experience (from positive to negative) with multiple-roles navigation (from segmentation to integration). When playing multiple roles, a person might experience a close manifestation of one of the following plausibility: positive segmentation, negative segmentation, positive integration or negative integration.
### Table 1

*Media Coordinators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Years as</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>News Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Walker</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Adams</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Radio and Online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>David Moore</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Taylor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Robinson</td>
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<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Thomas</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Harris</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Clark</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Johnson</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
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### Table 2

*Journalists*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Stephens</td>
<td>Station Manager, TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Jones</td>
<td>Reporter, Newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>Supervising Producer, TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew Ford</td>
<td>Reporter, TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Lynch</td>
<td>Editor, Newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>