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What's the harm in moonlighting? A qualitative survey on the role conflicts of freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR

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Abstract
There seems to be an internationally shared consensus on the ethical norm that journalists may not 'moonlight' for PR since this might conflict with their commitment to autonomy, truth, neutrality and objectivity. However, there is a gap between the normative demands on freelance journalists and the reality of their occupation: The changing world of professional working conditions is challenging journalists and has led to growing numbers of freelance journalists who also work for PR. Whether or not, and if so how freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR perceive and come to terms with conflicts has not yet been thoroughly examined. This contribution is dedicated to this gap in research and asks how freelance journalists who simultaneously work in the field of PR deal with their fundamentally conflicting roles (journalists' perception of inter-role conflicts; how they cope with inter-role conflicts). We conducted semi-structured guided interviews with 18 freelance journalists simultaneously working for PR clients. Our results show that they are aware of the

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potential for conflict involved in fulfilling the two roles. All participants are inclined to preserve their professional self-concept as journalists, with regard to which the coping strategies of marginalization and merging roles are particularly indicative.

Keywords
ethics, freelancers, journalism, moonlighting, public relations, role conflicts

There seems to be an internationally shared consensus on the ethical norm that journalists may not 'moonlight' since this might conflict with their commitment to autonomy, independence, truth, neutrality and objectivity.[1] The term 'moonlighting' means to perform any paid or unpaid additional secondary work outside one's regular/main occupational/professional activity. In Germany, for example, Netzwerk Recherche in 2006 proclaimed in its code of ethics for the media that journalists don't do PR (Schnedler, 2008: 2). This statement has been the subject of discussion since being made public as the reality in the occupational field of freelance journalists in particular is somewhat different: around 40% of freelancers also do PR work,[2] according to a member survey conducted by the German Federation of Journalists (DJV, 2009: 24). Thus, there is a gap between the normative demands on freelance journalists and the reality of their occupation. Being active in both professional roles can be complicated due to the fact that journalism and public relations fulfil two different functions in a democracy: journalism has a *public* duty to perform, which, in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, is firmly established in Article 5 of the constitution concerning freedom of the press. From a normative perspective, journalism contributes to the *public* good. The professional identity and ideal-typical values of journalism's occupational ideology (Deuze, 2005) derive from this normative perspective.[3] Contrary to this is the goal of public relations to serve the client's *particular* interests (Baerns, 1985: 16; Barth and Donsbach, 1992: 151) by means of public communication. When it comes to the functional focus, a further differentiation can be made between PR and journalism: while PR is concerned with generating issues, journalism and the media are concerned with conveying issues (Bentele et al., 1997: 227). This results in contrary expectations (roles) that apply to the two fields and cause conflicts under certain circumstances.

Against this background, Limor and Himelboim (2006: 278–80) find the question of how national codes of journalistic ethics address extra work in advertising and public relations 'especially captivating'. According to their analysis of 242 national codes from 94 countries, only 25 (10%) address public relations; 13 (52%) explicitly ban moonlighting in PR and 11% permit it with some constraints. When discussing their findings the authors note:

> Although only in-depth field research could explain the limited attention accorded to … public relations, three alternative explanations should be considered: 1. Engaging in such occupations is recognized almost universally as taboo, rendering its explicit mention in codes of ethics superfluous.… 2. … public relations work, although not expressly forbidden, must be evaluated on the basis of the conflict of interests issue that each media organization operationalizes according to its own concepts and policies. 3. No restrictions whatsoever are imposed on work of this type, which means that such activities are not considered problematic (2006: 279).

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And they conclude: 'From the academic point of view, the issue of journalism and additional work deserves further research' (Limor and Himelboim, 2006: 283).

While there is a lot of research on mutual perceptions of journalists and PR practitioners (e.g. Lewis et al., 2008; Sallot et al., 1998), on the ambivalent and wary views of journalists towards PR (e.g. DeLorme and Fedler, 2003; Merkel et al., 2007), and on the particularities of the source–journalist relationship (e.g. Palmer, 2000; White and Hobsbawm, 2007), it remains widely unclear whether 'PR journalists' (Buckow, 2011: 89) – Schnedler (2011: 77) refers to them as 'cross-border commuters' between two professional worlds – perceive their dual role as conflictual and how they deal with potential conflicts. So far only a single study investigates the topic: in her qualitative survey of 13 Swedish freelance journalists, Ladendorf (2012) asks how they justify also performing PR, whether it affects their self-identities and how they relate to the professional principles of journalism. Her interviewees confirm the blurring of borders between journalism and PR assignments, but at the same time it seemed crucial for them to maintain these borders. They say that it is impossible to survive as a freelancer in Sweden without doing extra work in PR ('survival takes priority over ethics'; Ladendorf, 2012: 88) but simultaneously consider it controversial for freelancers to accept PR assignments. Most of the interviewees in this study thought that, 'if they set up certain boundaries, they could take on such assignments without damaging their integrity and impartiality'; interestingly enough, the journalists' individual boundary settings did show some differences (Ladendorf, 2012: 90). The overall results of the study show that the interviewees 'reason and behave in accordance with an individual ethic, rather than with the professional principles of journalism', and that they 'are also willing to suffer the consequences of their ethics' (Ladendorf, 2012: 95–6).

Beyond the results of this single Swedish study, further questions still remain open: is it a problem for 'PR journalists' to fulfil the demands and adhere to the basic principles of journalism, while at the same time having to convincingly represent particular interests (of their PR clients) in the best possible way? Or does this duality ultimately harbour fewer problems than has largely been feared? If conflicts do arise, what measures do those affected take to avoid or cope with them? Journalism research in general and studies on freelance journalists in particular have failed to provide answers to such questions, and it is this gap that this article looks to address.

Theoretical background

Freelance journalists with additional secondary employment in the field of PR

The changing world of the professional working conditions of and within the media production industries (cf. Baumann, 2002) as well as cultural and technological developments are challenging the professional field of journalism (cf. Deuze, 2007) and leading to growing numbers of freelance[4] journalists worldwide (IFJ, 2006). In Germany, too, the professional field of freelance journalism has shown continuous and enormous growth in recent years (Meyen and Springer, 2009: 18; cf. also Weichler,

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2005: 71–2). The result has been much fiercer competition in an increasingly tough job market, making it necessary to search for other sources of income (Koch and Stollorz, 2008: 399), primarily in the field of PR. This is comparatively easy for (freelance) journalists, especially as journalistic knowledge and skills are in particularly high demand in the field of PR. In addition, PR assignments are attractive for journalists because workdays are more structured, the assignments themselves more abundant, and the pay is better than in (freelance) journalism. Also, the demand in the field is in a continual state of growth. Accordingly, Koch and Stollorz (2008) surmise that in the future even more freelance journalists will simultaneously seek employment in the field of PR.

In Germany, studies (partially) concerned with the occupational field of freelance journalists show unanimously that there is a remarkable percentage of freelance journalists who also have clients in the field of PR (e.g. Buckow, 2011; Meyen and Springer, 2009; Weischenberg et al., 2006a) and that these journalists tend to take on PR assignments predominantly for financial reasons. According to the German Federation of Journalists (DJV, 2009: 24), the average time spent on PR assignments by its members also working in PR constitutes about 20% of their total working time. PR assignments represent the primary occupational focus for only 10% of those interviewed (meaning that PR assignments account for 41% or more of their total occupation). Thus, although PR constitutes secondary employment for most freelancers, it in no way characterizes their profession. The freelance journalists interviewed by Meyen and Springer (2009: 65–70) who engage in secondary employment in the field of PR are aware of the public criticism concerning their dual role, yet they consider journalism and PR to be compatible with one another. Interviewees state that the combination is not a problem when, for instance, the respective subject areas differ or when the PR issues dealt with are of particular personal interest (e.g. issues of social engagement) (Meyen and Springer, 2009: 68). Furthermore, 80% of *Freischreiber* members – a professional association for freelance journalists – interviewed by Buckow (2011: 58, 83, 121) consider the two occupational fields to be compatible, as long as clients within the journalistic field disclose their PR activities and the subject areas are clearly separated, both thematically and temporally. Moreover, 56% of interviewees with a dual occupational role admitted to concealing their PR activities from clients in the journalistic field or, in other words, never making them aware of potential conflict situations (Buckow, 2011: 58–60, 107). In addition, interviewees were confronted with fictional conflict situations, such as a situation in which a journalist receives an assignment proposal from *Greenpeace Magazine* (Buckow, 2011: 135–40). The majority (55%) stated that they themselves had at some point received a similar offer from a publication of this kind. From the point of view of most of the interviewees, however, it would neither be an issue to accept the outlined assignment (96%) nor to subsequently sell the article in question to other media (84%) as long as the respective editorial team was informed as to the piece's origin and provided with additional research (Buckow, 2011: 84–9, 121–3). More in-depth analysis of the action strategies, problem awareness or conflict resolution of journalists in this dual role has not been conducted as yet. Role-theoretical approaches, about which the next section will provide some information, are well suited for this.

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Inter-role conflicts

As outlined above, journalists and PR practitioners fulfil different functions in and for society. Considered from a role-theoretical perspective,[5] journalists and PR practitioners occupy two different positions in society. Associated with both positions are different expectations, from which roles arise (Wiswede, 1977: 18). Professionals in these positions have to learn about their roles (Biddle, 1979). As in the case of journalists and PR practitioners, socialization occurs, for example, within the context of editorials departments, PR agencies and/or in-house PR departments respectively. When behaviour expectations of people who occupy different positions are contradictory, inter-role conflicts can arise[6] (e.g. Dahrendorf, 2006: 82–4; Getzels and Guba, 1954: 165; Gross et al., 1966: 287–8; Wiswede, 1977: 115). From a normative point of view in particular, this can be the case with freelance journalists who also work in PR. By being active in both of these different positions, distinctive expectations exist for both of them. Freelance journalists, for example, have to (critically) report on relevant issues and be independent of political or economic interest groups. On the contrary, for instance, role expectations aimed at PR practitioners are communicating adequately according to the interests of their clients. However, freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR might not always be able to (efficiently) fulfil these expectations, or the particular client might assume they have not been fulfilled. A conflict situation can consequently emerge, for example, when a journalist with secondary employment in the field of public relations is urged by his client in journalism to critically report on his client in the field of PR. In such a case, according to Bunjes (2008: 23), the freelance journalist is confronted with the following possibilities and consequences: 'He could refuse to report and thus loose a journalistic job, he could report twice and earn money twice, or he could report critically and therefore lose the more profitable job.' Moreover or as a result, alleged or actual role conflicts can indeed result in inadequate role fulfilment (Getzels and Guba, 1954: 165) and in the case of journalism there is even a fear of de-professionalization (e.g. Weischenberg et al., 2006a: 189–90).

Deviation from (socially founded) expectations is usually socially sanctioned, for instance, by means of reprobation, public criticism or marginalization (Dahrendorf, 2006: 40–7; Kepplinger and Maurer, 2008: 165). Role conflicts also put strain on the professionals themselves, as the incompatibility of the two roles leads to stress and role-related pressure (e.g. Goode, 1960: 484–5; Kepplinger and Maurer, 2008: 166; Wiswede, 1977: 142–9). The parties concerned are averse to such consequences, which leads them to seek to prevent conflicts in advance (*prevention* strategies) as well as to reduce conflicts that have already arisen (*coping* strategies).[7] Prevention is successful, for example, when one manages to conceal a conflictual role from people with potentially contrary expectations (passive shielding) (Wiswede, 1977: 129). If prevention fails, one seeks to cope with the conflict: amidst the role conflict, one decides in favour of the expectation that appears (normatively) more legitimate, corresponds to a greater extent with their needs or harbours a lower potential for sanctioning (Getzels and Guba, 1954: 174; Gross et al., 1966; Merton, 1957: 114–16; Wiswede, 1977: 123, 129–31). Critics of the dual role, in addition, can be subjected to defamation, for example, by being labelled as deviants or hypocrites (neutralization) (see also Sykes and Matza, 1968: 368–9; Wüstmann,

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1972: 107). Actively and openly broaching the issue of role conflict, by contrast, is a strategy that aims to achieve a compromise with the relevant reference groups (in terms of expectations) (Wiswede, 1977: 131).

Empirical studies on role conflicts, especially in professional roles, have been conducted by various scientific disciplines (e.g. Fink et al., 2010; Hälker, 2005; Loder and Spillane, 2005; Patry and Schrattbauer, 2000; Stracke and Nerdinger, 2009). In the field of communication science, there have been comparatively few studies conducted on the role conflicts of communications professionals (e.g. Belz et al., 1989; Hoffmann, 2003; Kepplinger and Maurer, 2008; Steinmann et al., 1993, 1995; Westley and McLean, 1957; see also Kepplinger, 2011: 41–60 and Rühl, 1979, for theoretical approaches). Some journalism studies for example show that journalists in general quote moral values such as authenticity, integrity or transparency as an alternative to professional norms and ethics which they might struggle with (Boudana, 2011: 394–5).

Whether or not, and if so how freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR perceive and come to terms with conflicts has not yet been thoroughly examined; existing studies on freelance journalists (e.g. Buckow, 2011; Meyen and Springer, 2009) deal only peripherally with this particular topic. In this context, Weischenberg (2011: 5) recently remarked that journalism in Germany may not be the best in the world, but it is certainly the most thoroughly researched. However, there is at least one gap in research: freelance journalists who are moonlighting.

Research questions

This article is dedicated to this gap in research, and is specifically concerned with how freelance journalists who simultaneously work in the field of public relations deal with their conflicting roles. We are first interested in journalists' own perceptions of inter-role conflicts. Do they experience their two roles as being in conflict with one another and do they perceive direct and indirect expectations of relevant reference persons who criticize their dual occupation? Second, and also of specific interest, is the question of how freelance journalists engaged in PR work cope with inter-role conflicts. Here, we differentiate between preventative strategies, employed to avoid conflict situations, and coping strategies to help resolve existing conflicts. Finally, we determine whether there are various types of journalists based on conflict perception and action strategies.

1. Are journalists who simultaneously pursue secondary employment in the field of PR aware of inter-role conflicts, and if so, how can they be described?
2. What strategies do freelance journalists who simultaneously pursue secondary employment in the field of PR apply in order to avoid inter-role conflicts (prevention)?
3. What strategies do freelance journalists who simultaneously pursue secondary employment in the field of PR apply in order to resolve existing inter-role conflicts (coping)?
4. Are there different types of freelance journalists based on the perception of role conflicts and action strategies for dealing with role conflicts that can arise as a result of dual occupation in journalism and PR?

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On the basis of these research questions, we use a micro-theoretical approach which may allow us to make an innovative contribution to the understanding of the interrelations between journalism and public relations.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, semi-structured guided interviews were conducted, giving interviewees the necessary freedom to articulate complex opinions and experiences. The interviewer, though bound to a certain set of questions, had the possibility to follow up independently in order to gain a deeper understanding and spontaneously formulate ad hoc questions relevant to the research's subject matter.

Our participants are freelance journalists who simultaneously engage in secondary employment in the field of PR. We define journalists as people who work for a journalistic medium as their main job (meaning more than half of their income and/or working time) and carry out journalistic activities in this context, that is, publish on current and socially relevant topics (Weischenberg et al., 2006a: 30–1). According to our definition, freelance journalists are those who are not committed to a permanent employer (see Meyen and Springer, 2009). Freelance journalists are not involved in an employment relationship that is subject to the compulsory payment of social insurance contributions but instead make a living by charging professional fees, which they generate through self-employed work for numerous clients (see e.g. Mast, 2000; Götz von Olenhusen, 2008; Ory and Schmittmann, 2002; Wirths, 1994).

Freelancers were only included in the sample on the condition that they were simultaneously pursuing a secondary occupation in the field of PR. In addition, participants were required to be spending at least 20% of their working time on PR assignments and had to have been engaged in both fields for at least six months (at the time of recruitment). These two conditions ensured that each person in the sample has sufficient and current experience in the dual role. We recruited participants through press offices. More than 80% of those contacted agreed to take part in the study. As a result of which, self-selection bias, while not completely ruled out, is at least minimized. On the basis of gender and age distribution, we ultimately created a sample group consisting of 18 participants (50% female; average age of 41.1 years; see Table 1).

The guided interview comprises 17 main questions and is divided into three thematic sections: (1) questions about professional background as well as current occupational situation; (2) questions that focus on the self-concept regarding roles in journalism and PR, working conditions and job satisfaction, as well as reasons for pursuing employment in both fields; (3) questions relating to the perception and ways of dealing with potential inter-role conflicts. In terms of their formulation, the questions in the third part of this interview needed to meet particularly strict requirements since, as a result of the topic's sensitive nature, the answers would otherwise have been prone to distortion owing to social and professional desirability biases. In order to ensure valid results, we used both fictional and real examples (e.g. 'Netzwerk Recherche proclaims in its code of ethics for the media that journalists don't do PR. What's your take on this?') as well as questions about third parties (e.g. 'Imagine one of your colleagues has to report about an energy company, but occasionally this colleague also does PR work in the energy industry; what would you advise your colleague to do?').

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Table 1. Participants of the present study.

Interviewee No.	Sex	Age	Highest educational attainment level	Classic journalistic cadetship	Subject matter/ topic of focus
1	female	30	postgraduate university degree	yes	Culture/Modern Society
2	female	32	postgraduate university degree	no	Culture/Modern Society
3	female	36	high-school diploma	no	Economics/Health
4	female	36	secondary school certificate	yes	Gastronomy
5	female	47	postgraduate university degree	yes	Economics/ Modern Society
6	female	47	postgraduate university degree	yes	Science(s)/Food
7	female	49	postgraduate university degree	yes	Edu./Science(s)/ Social Affairs
8	female	58	postgraduate university degree	no	Science(s)/Health
9	female	58	postgraduate university degree	yes	Science(s)/Culture
10	male	29	high-school diploma	yes	Politics
11	male	32	postgraduate university degree	no	Politics/Culture
12	male	32	postgraduate university degree	no	Economics/ Culture
13	male	36	postgraduate university degree	no	Culture
14	male	36	postgraduate university degree	no	Technology/IT
15	male	39	high-school diploma	yes	Music
16	male	40	postgraduate university degree	yes	Modern Society/ Tourism/Travel
17	male	45	postgraduate university degree	yes	Health/Economics/ IT
18	male	48	postgraduate university degree	yes	Education

The 12 telephone and 6 face-to-face interviews, lasting between 25 and 79 minutes (45 minutes on average), were recorded under assurance of anonymity and then transcribed. The analysis was in line with the five steps for analysing guided interviews outlined by Schmidt (2005) and with the guidelines for qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2003). From our theoretical foundation, we derived categories that we modified and added to inductively after repeatedly working through the sample material. The fourth step described by Schmidt, a quantifying material overview, was not expedient with regard to our research question. The prudent quantification ('almost all participants' or 'half of the participants') should be

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interpreted with due caution because of the non-representativeness of the sample. We forgo an in-depth characterization of the participants on the grounds of the promised anonymization.

Results

The primary socialization (Merton, 1995: 361) of nearly all participants[8] took place in the field of journalism: they had completed a journalistic programme of study or traineeship and worked as freelance journalists. Two-thirds of them did not actively seek PR assignments but instead were offered them by colleagues or companies. The participants predominantly cite financial reasons as being behind their decision to do PR: almost all participants lament the difficult financial situation of freelance journalists. Other reasons given for the dual role include the steadily increasing supply of assignments and greater job security in the field of PR. However, one-third of participants stressed that they enjoyed working on PR assignments and experienced the change positively. In this respect, they at least partially contradict the assumption about PR activities being nothing more than an imperative for a lot of freelance journalists.

Perception of inter-role conflicts

Participants are aware that conflicts can arise as a result of their dual roles in journalism and PR. They also largely agree that, from a normative perspective, it would be better if they never had to perform a balancing act between the two professions: 'That's also the kind of hardline thinking that you've still got on the inside. And you feel kind of ashamed', a 31-year-old journalist stated. Still, almost all participants perceived the dual role as being low stress and rarely conflictual. Conflict situations arise for two reasons: first, there can be a discrepancy between the expectations of relevant reference persons (e.g. clients or colleagues), which leads to conflict. In this case the discrepancy is sanctioned, for instance, by means of marginalization or reprobation by colleagues, or by termination of the professional relationship on the part of the client. Second, the participants have internalized certain role-related expectations, whereby the incompatibility of the two roles – even in the absence of expectations of external reference persons – can lead to stress and manifest in moral deliberations. The following analysis examines the two causes mentioned above.

The participants stated that, on the part of *relevant reference persons*, they only seldom perceive expectations that oppose their dual occupation. None of the participants were ever advised by journalistic clients to refrain from engaging in PR activities. Only two interviewees had ever heard of such instances before. An interviewee concludes: 'In my opinion, journalistic clients and freelance journalists are all very much in the same boat and they [the clients] are informed about the economic conditions of freelance journalists nowadays.' So, being familiar with the precarious situation journalists face, journalistic clients consequently understand the need of many freelancers to have two jobs, making rebukes or objections on their part extremely rare occurrences. Only very large media companies appear to have reservations, but in most cases no one on the editorial staff pays much attention to the PR activities some of their colleagues engage in. The PR clients

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have an exclusively positive attitude towards hiring journalists (freelancers). According to our interviewees this is because they use their journalistic skills very well when producing PR materials. Moreover, freelance journalists would often know 'about the internal routines in the journalistic editorial offices [and] … sometimes even have personal contacts to these', as one interviewee states. That is of course highly appreciated by PR clients when dealing with press/media relations.

The participants also explained that both colleagues and friends hardly ever expressed negative opinions about their dual roles. However, the interviewees did admit to the existence of journalists who categorically oppose dual roles ('thoroughbred journalists', 'hardcore colleagues'). One participant, for example, states that some of his journalistic colleagues would criticize his double role, reminding him that 'journalists do not do PR'. The acceptance of secondary employment in the field of PR among colleagues has also changed over the course of time. As a journalist, it would have been unthinkable ten years ago to do PR work on the side, but it has now become 'more acceptable, because it's simply more common'. Close to half of the participants reported that their second job sometimes even evokes admiration and jealousy among their peers: 'Most of my colleagues say … how did you get into that? They'd also like to do it, because they know how well paid it is', stated a 40-year-old journalist. While the direct reference groups tolerate or even admire the dual role, the participants tended on the whole to conceal or marginalize their engagement in PR activities.

Besides the expectations of reference groups, inter-role conflicts also arise as a result of conflicting *internalized role expectations*. According to our participants, having to complete a journalistic assignment about one's PR client and their competitors represents a 'classic' conflict situation. If it turns out that the competitors perform better in a given respect, this could lead to a conflict situation with the client in question. Conversely, the PR client does not expect to receive negative media coverage and could sanction this by cancelling the contract. Positive articles about the PR client, on the other hand, lead to a loss of journalistic credibility, making it more difficult to obtain subsequent journalistic assignments. Conflicts could also arise when the PR client's sensitive internal information could potentially be used for a journalistic assignment but is instead omitted in order not to affect the relationship with the client – especially to protect future assignments. According to our interviewees, problems could arise when the texts prepared within the scope of PR assignments or the research upon which they are based, impinge upon internalized journalistic norms. In this context one 45-year-old interviewee, who earns about half his income doing PR assignments, stated that one would 'never report false information, but of course some things get left out', and that 'what happens is you instinctively do less in-depth research'. A 48-year-old addressed this point by saying that for him a PR topic has to 'be based on facts … and conform to journalistic principles', in order for him to accept the assignment. The vast majority of interviewees consider this to be less problematic when journalists employ specific prevention strategies in order to anticipate and avoid troublesome situations. Our survey results are pervasively characterized by a kind of optimistic bias in terms of interviewee perceptions: from the interviewees' point of view, their colleagues are more concerned with inter-role conflicts; the interviewees themselves are rarely or never affected. Besides, some other colleagues would be far less capable of handling the double role than them. For instance, a female interviewee states

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that 'there are some colleagues who do not mind that [the combination of journalistic and PR work] at all.… They are not critical at all, which is also not the right way.'

Prevention strategies for avoiding inter-role conflicts

We identify three strategies in particular for avoiding potential inter-role conflicts: topic separation, client selection and passive shielding. Consistent *topic separation* should ensure that one does not report journalistically about PR clients. Otherwise

> you burn yourself on both sides. As far as the company is concerned … I can never write favourably enough. And when it comes to the editorial team, the article can never be critical enough. So, as an author, how am I supposed to get something positive out of it?

Hence, in order to, on the one hand, avoid alienating PR clients and, on the other hand, remain credible as a journalist, the journalistic and PR topics should have nothing to do with each other: 'Let's assume for a second that someone writes for the politics section and does PR work for a sports company on the side. What's wrong with that?' However, when asked, interviewees admitted that this axiom of topic separation is hard to get and that the transgression of thematic boundaries is not always avoidable. The re-utilization of PR topics in the field of journalism and vice versa is simply 'practical sometimes', since the associated synergy effects lead to much more profitable work. One journalist even claimed always to research topics for PR assignments separately from the PR client in question in order to 'sell the article in appropriate portions to the buyer for whom it really is the ideal story'. Thus, consistent topic separation appears to be more of a utopian normative stipulation than a realistic option.

The second prevention strategy that the participants employ is a strict *selection of PR clients*. Most journalists, for instance, would never accept assignments for organizations or persons with questionable or unethical objectives, or who hold views that contradict with the journalist's own. Banks and insurance, energy or armament companies, as well as political parties are given as examples here. When an assignment for a political party does end up being accepted, this occurs only on the condition that the journalist is partial to this party: 'I for one tend to justify it to myself a bit … that these are all things that might represent my own worldview.' In such cases, one would demand as much journalistic freedom as possible from the PR client, which is usually possible, since most PR clients expect writing that is 'as journalistic as possible' and also critical. This tactic employed by journalists can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain the journalistic perspective, even when engaging in PR assignments (see also Loder and Spillane, 2005: 272).

The third prevention strategy used by the participants is that they tend to conceal their PR activities. Without question, they would not lie to their journalistic client concerning this matter and when asked directly would also admit to the dual role. However, they hardly ever communicate openly about their work in PR. In negotiations for assignments, they often present themselves purely as journalists. Ideally, they can differentiate depending on the client (e.g. Buckow, 2011: 89). One interviewee explains: 'Talking to journalistic colleagues about journalism, I would rather talk about my work for the radio

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station. If the focus of the conversation is on the economic situation, I would surely say something about my PR work.' Another states that she would never speak about her PR work in the first place, since this part of work would not contribute to her professional identity. This tactic, according to Wiswede (1977: 129), can be referred to as *passive shielding* of the PR position. Our participants do not consider the concealment of PR activities to be problematic since they themselves would easily be able to fulfil both professional roles: disclosing the simultaneous occupation in PR 'could lead to some people getting the impression … that I'm not able to properly separate the two. Of course I'm capable of this, but not everyone knows that.' Furthermore, hardly any interviewees consider it necessary to take it upon themselves to inform the journalistic client about their PR activities in the case of thematic overlaps. According to our results, the open thematization of dual roles is not applied towards the respective client as a strategy for preventing inter-role conflicts (Wiswede, 1977: 131).

Coping strategies for reducing inter-role conflicts

When prevention fails or is not possible, our interviewees use three strategies in particular to cope with arising conflicts: (1) merging of roles, (2) marginalization of their own PR activities, and (3) neutralization by means of rejection or shifting of responsibility. These strategies – as opposed to prevention – do not necessarily occur consciously. The *merging of roles* (Turner, 1962: 26; Wiswede, 1977: 130) is a coping strategy used to arrange conflicting roles. In the course of this, two opposing roles converge until one of the roles is absorbed or a new one created. When many individuals simultaneously act from the perspective of two roles, a new accepted role can develop socio-structurally on a long-term basis (e.g. Wiswede, 1977: 131). The findings of our study indicate that freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR are indeed experiencing such a long-term transition of self-concept, which they observe both on their own part and on that of their colleagues. One female journalist, for example, stated that during her studies she still viewed herself as part of the Fourth Estate, and could not imagine ever accepting PR assignments. Moreover, the interviewees argued that there certainly are forms of journalism other than 'just' the investigative kind. As a result, some participants prefer to refer to themselves as 'story tellers' or 'information architects'. And yet, most of them consider themselves to be mediators of information or providers of useful information for the recipients. In view of such responses we surmise that shortly before or while accepting PR assignments, the journalists in question adjust their self-concept in relation to their role – away from that of the critic and more towards the intermediary. This also seems to be plausible for the reason that the self-concept as an intermediary found the highest approval rating among German journalists, according to Weischenberg et al. (2006a: 102–10), while that of a critic has become less important over the last few decades.

The *marginalization of one's own PR activities* is another important strategy freelance journalists use to overcome inter-role conflicts. One scientific journalist told us about thematic overlaps between her journalistic work and her PR assignments for a medical foundation, which she nevertheless found to be uncomplicated since the activities she engaged in for the foundation merely affected 'fringe areas' of her journalistic area of

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expertise, and therefore the potential for 'conflicts of interest' were 'extremely low'. Other interviewees also explained that they only worked on niche topics in the field of PR. In addition, there did not seem to be any particular controversy in their respective journalistic departments as a consequence of their PR activities; as opposed to colleagues who work for the political or economic section, or who write about topics such as armaments or atomic energy. Making distinctions between allegedly different kinds of PR is also part of this strategy. As one 32-year-old journalist stated, 'In my opinion, there's PR that tries to generate credibility and come across as honest, and then of course there's this campaign PR.' In particular, our interviewees draw this dividing line by considering specific activities within PR: they do not perform copywriting activities or do the legwork for PR actors, such as writing press releases. Instead they fulfil a function of 'journalistic PR' as, for example, exclusively working in the corporate publishing sector.

Third and finally, *neutralization* is another strategy used to cope with conflicts. Here, interviewees simply refuse to take responsibility for their dual role (Sykes and Matza, 1968: 365–7; Wüstmann, 1972: 107). In most cases they refer to the precarious economic situation in the field of freelance journalism. They claim to have 'bills to pay, and that can't be done with idealistic work. So then you have to compromise.' They consider it to be unethical that editorial departments take advantage of the freelance journalists' cheap labour while at the same time keeping a critical eye on their simultaneous work in PR, which they might even go so far as to sanction. This is an attempt to assign blame to the journalistic clients, who, according to the participants, could choose to inform themselves about the journalists they contract; when asked, the journalists would then respond honestly (e.g. Gross et al., 1966; Sykes and Matza, 1968: 368–9; Wiswede, 1977: 130).

In our survey, there is no indication of partitioning, in which 'situations … that lead to conflicting role expectations' (Wiswede, 1977: 129) can be temporally or spatially kept apart (also see Merton, 1995: 355–6). Only one solitary interviewee in our study mentioned her strategy of spatially separating PR from journalistic work. The interviewees also did not make any reference to the strategy of temporal separation. This seems plausible to us since one must realistically assume that assignments, depending on their supply and the time at which they are accepted, either have to be completed one after the other or done simultaneously. It is hardly possible to separate assignments by postponement when working 'on demand'.

Typology

There are systematic differences in the question as to how our interviewees perceive the potential for inter-role conflicts inherent to simultaneous employment in journalism and PR, and how they avoid or reduce these conflicts. In this regard, we confirm Ladendorf's (2012) current findings about freelancers' different strategies to deal with conflicts. In consideration of her findings and to examine these in greater detail, as well as to work out similarities within the groups by reverse-conclusion, we decided to develop a typology. For the first typology criterion, we use perception and assessment of the potential for role conflict, and scoured the transcripts for similarities and differences. Our second criterion for constructing this typology is the way of dealing with conflicts, that is, the strategies of prevention and coping. On the basis of these criteria, we are able to

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distinguish between four types of freelance journalists: (1) optimists, (2) pragmatists, (3) repressors and (4) resigned.

Optimists may perceive the potential for inter-role conflicts as being problematic but are rarely confronted with them in everyday life, according to their own experience. Although PR is a financial must for optimists, they nevertheless find enjoyment in this activity: for them PR means a change, a challenge and, to some degree, self-realization as an organizer. The fact that they can also work for prestigious companies, develop their skills and gain experience within the context of this 'closed circle' is also a source of pride. As a consequence, optimists deal very openly with their dual occupation and prefer to face inter-role conflicts with passive prevention or coping strategies. Optimists consider themselves to be journalists in both fields of employment, stress the continuation of their journalistic craft in PR, and put together their assignment repertoire accordingly. In our sample, two women and one man fall into this typological category.

Pragmatists are completely aware of the potential for inter-role conflicts but nevertheless endure the state of cognitive tension. PR work is no fun for them: they engage in it only to supplement their earnings. Although from a normative point of view, they consider the dual role to be awkward, the feeling of 'falling through the net' is unknown to them. Depending on the client, they adapt to the new situation and complete the assignment pragmatically, in keeping with the saying 'He who has the gold makes the rules.' They deal with their secondary employment in PR relatively openly in the face of 'thoroughbred journalists', and also towards clients, to whom they have no problem disclosing their dual role. In this respect, prevention and coping strategies are hardly an issue for mercenaries. This is all the more astonishing since they clearly separate the functions of journalism from those of PR: in PR it is a matter of exerting influence and 'generating demand'. As a journalist, by contrast, there is a public duty to fulfil. They have a cool, calm and collected attitude towards their professional situation, and are satisfied with their dual role. In our sample we identified four journalists of this type: all four are men in their early thirties to mid-forties.

Repressors[9] are the type of freelance journalists most commonly found in our sample. Despite being aware of the potential for role conflict, they consider it irrelevant, since they themselves are apparently never confronted with such conflicts. Consequently, they display mainly prevention strategies. Repressors claim to perform PR activities completely according to the principles of journalism – which makes no sense, either from the point of view of professional PR or of professional journalism. Correspondingly, they emphasize the similarity between PR activities and classical journalism: the skills and tools of the trade are by and large the same, and it is possible to convey things and entertain recipients in PR, too. In addition, they believe that PR and journalism will continue to converge in any case – a development that they see very little trouble with. As opposed to the pragmatists described above, repressors perceive PR and journalism as very similar areas of employment. The interviewees in this typological category are from all age groups with the majority being women.

The *resigned* are burdened by the potential for inter-role conflicts in their dual occupation. They risk everything to avoid conflicts and tend in particular to conceal their PR assignments for fear of negative repercussions. The resigned would actually prefer to work as investigative journalists but are forced for financial reasons to shelve their

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professional self-concept, which also comes from the fact that they enjoyed a very good journalistic education not too long ago. In view of this, the curtailments they have to make for PR assignments in terms of their journalistic abilities and moral values are quite debilitating. Hence, the resigned are extremely self-critical. They reflect on and have the intention of doing as much journalistic work as possible. This typological category has very few and only female members among our participants

Summary and discussion

There have hardly been any studies dedicated explicitly to freelance journalists who work simultaneously in the field of PR. This study examines how these journalists perceive their dual role and how they prevent or cope with conflicts that arise in this context. The first key finding of this study is that the participants are aware of the potential for conflict in their dual role. In this respect, we align ourselves with Meyen and Springer's (2009: 68) conclusion that the people in question have been aware of the public criticism regarding the intermingling of journalism and public relations for quite some time. It is all the more surprising then that all interviewees claimed to only be confronted with such conflicts extremely rarely; their colleagues, however, appear to have problems fulfilling their dual role far more frequently.

The diverse attempts at prevention show that journalists take their dual role seriously. Some even claimed to be 'stung with remorse' and spoke of how they discussed these problems with colleagues. Others, especially participants who have been working in PR for some time, seem to have already come to terms with their dual role. They also seem to be trying to capitalize on the advantages and synergy effects of the situation (e.g. by means of thematic inspiration from PR). However, all participants are inclined to preserve their professional self-concept as journalists, of which the coping strategies of marginalization and merging roles are particularly indicative. This is reminiscent of Betzelt's (2006: 39–45) findings: the freelancers she interviewed, who had to seek an additional 'mainstay' for financial reasons (e.g. journalists with secondary employment in PR), identified themselves prevailingly with their core occupation and not so much with their secondary employment. Overall, the problematic nature of dual occupation and the resulting social echo seem at least to be firmly rooted in the consciousness of all of our participants. All in all, our results confirm Ladendorf's (2012: 96) most recent findings for Swedish freelance journalists: 'The analysis shows that the informants (interviewees; the authors) reason and behave in accordance with an individual ethic, rather than with the professional principles of journalism.'

The responsibility for dealing with the dual occupation thereby does not lie exclusively with the freelance journalists themselves. This form of occupation seems rather to be a result of the overall situation of freelance journalists in Germany (and certainly not only here). The occupational field is growing and many freelance journalists are competing for a limited number of assignments. In order to remain competitive, editorial departments pass on the cost pressure, which arises as a result of general financial difficulties of traditional media (see Kiefer, 2011: 5–7), to freelance journalists (e.g. Buckow, 2011: 13–14; Meyen and Springer, 2009). Hence, it appears as though journalistic institutions and freelance journalists with secondary employment in PR are trying to sabotage one

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another. Beyond this, however, it is obvious: to stress journalists' limitations which might arise from precarious (economic) circumstances of the media industry (cf. Borden, 2007; Fröhlich, 2009; Murdock and Wasko, 2007) is not to relieve journalists of any responsibility. On the other hand, as the EFJ (2003: 5) puts it: 'In such a sensitive activity as journalism, it is actually the stability of the employment relationship, together with the related economic stability, which can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of independence and autonomy in the exercise of this profession.'

This article does leave some room for justified criticism. This begins with the composition of the sample: despite being able to roughly trace the socio-demographic characteristics of the occupational field of freelance journalists (cf. Meyen and Springer, 2009), not all possible subject areas are sufficiently represented. Moreover, there was no differentiation regarding the range or particular type of PR activity. This was due to the criteria upon which the selection of the sample was based. Therefore, we cannot report on the kind of PR work the interviewed freelance journalists do as secondary employment. This means we are not able to deduce if freelance journalists doing a certain type of PR work experience more, less or even no role conflicts in comparison to other journalists. This would be worth looking at in future studies. Furthermore, a distortion of the results owing to the self-selection of participants as well as social desirability cannot be completely ruled out.

The problems and results mentioned in this study offer numerous opportunities for further research. In this context, it would be of particular relevance to compare the perspective of freelance journalists who simultaneously pursue employment in PR with the perspective of those who do not. In doing so it would be possible, for instance, to examine changes in professional self-perception more suitably. Analogously, one could inquire about the similarities and differences with regard to the perception of and ways of dealing with inter-role conflicts among journalists who engage in PR activities to various extents (e.g. only a small part of their total occupation vs. primarily). Our supposition of an optimistic bias, according to which journalists' colleagues are perceived to be affected far more extensively than the interviewees themselves, also provides room for subsequent studies. The origin of this perception, and the questions as to why there is a downright distrust towards colleagues employed in the PR field, as well as who is most strongly affected by this, should all be addressed by future international studies. This is due to the fact that our findings are almost certainly related to the specific professional norms and ethics and the cultural context in Germany.

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Notes

1. Since the ideal type of journalistic identity does not fully translate to reality, such normative journalistic standards are naturally questioned and have always been seen as problematic (see Boudana, 2011; Cottle, 2000; Hackett, 1984; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007; Stoker, 1995; Tuchman, 1972).
2. Wassermann (2009: 234) calls it 'serial moonlighting'.

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3. Beyond this normative consideration and following Altschull (1995: 66) such values also represent commercial benefits: 'It pays to practice objectivity; political neutrality is a commercial benefit. To maximize the number of subscribers, it is necessary to avoid taking sides politically.' Similarly Tuchman (1972: 664).
4. For studies on freelance journalists, see, for example, Baines (1999), Storey et al. (2005), Henninger and Gottschall (2007), Hannis (2008) and Edstrom and Ladendorf (2012).
5. Though 'confusion and malintegration persist in role theory' (Biddle, 1986: 67–8), there are, however, some partial theories dealing with the specific problems of role conflicts that are utilized for this study (e.g. Biddle, 1979; Schülein, 1989; Wiswede, 1976).
6. These are not to be confused with intra-role conflicts: conflicts between various expectations *within a single position* (e.g. Dahrendorf, 2006: 82; Gross et al., 1958: 448).
7. Provided the parties concerned do not use any denial strategies but recognize the inter-role conflict as being relevant for them personally.
8. Only three participants were initially employed in PR (either after studying or directly after graduation/ 'Abitur') and then later began working in journalism.
9. Following the psychological 'concept of the defense mechanism' (Cramer, 2000: 637), we chose the term 'repressor' as a specific defense mechanism (among others) deployed by people to keep challenging, threatening, stressful, negative, etc. thoughts out of their personal awareness.

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