

# **SOCIAL JUSTICE IN COLLEGE MEDIA: HOW CAMPUS MAGAZINES REPORT, REFLECT, AND RESPOND TO POLICE KILLING OF BREONNA TAYLOR**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60543/ijms.v2i1.9232>

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**Schedule for publication**

Paper Submitted: 15th January 2024  
Accepted for Publication: 8th March 2024  
Published Online:

## Abstract

Campus magazines by nature avoid event and breaking-news content, digging deeper to present social and cultural impacts. However, the killing of a Black woman in her own home—awakened by a flawed no-knock warrant—changed “culture” and “life-style” for student editors. Based upon a prior study, this study aimed to examine how student media—as a Community of Practice—would respond, report, and reflect on the social impacts of the police killing of Breonna Taylor. Editions from three nationwide contests were sampled 2019–2022, focusing on three variables: Cover, Table of Contents, and Editor’s Note. Guided by Problematic Integration Theory and informed by semiotic analysis, the authors identified 15 themes from the dataset. Comparative analyses show demonstrations, responses, and profiles dominate coverage post-shutdown. Results confirm that “identity” persists in a Community of Practice even when “practice” demands operational scrutiny.

**Keywords:** campus magazine, Breonna Taylor, social justice, community of practice, problematic integration theory

## Introduction

Magazines can serve as a touchstone for society—reflecting a readership's community, concerns, culture, and ideals (Magnus, 2020). Some say the relationship is two-way: magazine content is both a “mirror of and catalyst for the tenor and tone of the sociocultural realities of their times” (Abrahamson & Prior-Miller, 2015, p.1) while also serving community needs and interests.

When society experiences milestones—a prince becomes king, Olympic gold medallist earns their eighth national championship, India lands on the moon—magazines offer society a way to mark these moments with keepsake editions (Kitch, 2006), giving readers “memory vehicles” (p. 96); they serve as cultural artifacts (Piepmeier, 2008). But when trauma strikes—and life is inexorably changed—magazine editors face operational decisions in order to keep content authentic to continue to serve their readership with relevance to the times at hand.

How content reflects these decisions and direction is worthy of study, particularly as readers are known to turn to their magazine community during milestone moments. Research also shows that during times of great crisis, demand for information increases (Casero-Ripollès, 2020; Westlund & Ghersetti, 2015) and can vary depending on the nature of the need (immediate or long-term).

While lifestyle magazines vary by genre and reflect the personality of the editor-in-chief, campus magazines cover the various layers of campus culture, serving as a collector and expression of a community's ideals and as a statement of cultural identity (Piepmeier, 2008). Similar to consumer magazines, the content is a mix of features on the art scene, deep dives into lifestyle hacks, profiles of big personalities and local heroes, and a statement from the editor's notepad telling readers the backstory of the edition's goals and the

message that contextualises in time and place. A campus magazine is an outlet for artistic, cultural, and lifestyle experimentation, but also a gatherer of moments and memories occurring on college campuses and in the lives of their students and how they intersect with the surrounding community. And, similar to consumer magazines, campus publications capture milestone moments with their voices and in their space; the sense of loss, isolation, and fear as campuses shuttered and social justice demonstrations occurred was captured and preserved during a historic moment. For a newly defined campus culture (Terracina-Hartman, 2024), the campus magazine offers a shared experience and maintains a community.

## Literature review

### *Magazines*

Building on a prior semiotic analysis study to examine the incidence and occurrence of changes in the editorial direction of campus magazines post-pandemic shutdown (Terracina-Hartman, 2024), this study further examines one result in detail: how racial justice protests appear in content. The research identifies the discourse, the design, and not only the wrongs that need rights, but faces called up as being wronged[A1]. Of particular interest is how the police killing of Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020 appeared in college students' expressions of campus culture, society, safety, justice, racism, and their future.

Recent trends support the concept of magazines' role in building and sustaining communities during milestone moments: Katie Robertson (2022) writes how magazines such as *Jezebel* and *The 19<sup>th</sup>* saw a surge in readers and subscriptions after a leaked opinion from The Supreme Court suggesting *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned (p. B1). Other editors, such as Alexandra Smith, audience director of *The 19<sup>th</sup>*, say content isn't dedicated to daily news updates and that readers seek

"Context, implications for other parts of their lives and that's the niche we've been able to fill" (p. B1). *Jezebel* editor-in-chief Lauren Bassett says the magazine's content on reproductive rights emphasizes telling people's stories, giving people a voice (p. B1): "We do pieces of writing that should be readable for everyone, but am I trying to expand *Jezebel's* audience into the pro-life crowd? No, I am not" (p. B1).

Emergency Medical Technician Breonna Taylor was at home in her Louisville apartment on March 13, 2020, dozing in bed after spending the evening watching a movie with her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker. The pair heard pounding on the front door, but no answers to their "Who is it?" inquiries. Four LMPD officers used a battering ram to break down their door. Walker, using his licensed firearm, fired a warning shot, hitting one officer in the leg. Officers fired a volley of shots, hitting Taylor six times. One shot proved fatal. The investigation later revealed the no-knock warrant to search her apartment for drugs was falsified and the person of interest was known to be elsewhere. Four officers were charged and one is awaiting federal sentencing, while another is awaiting a trial date as of March 2024 (Nakamura, 2024).

Initially, news coverage of Breonna Taylor's shooting death numbered eight articles in major news outlets the 60 days after her killing (Samuels et al., 2021). Post-George Floyd murder, however, her death gained more attention and the news coverage shifted—essentially, a fuller story of the botched raid and her death were revealed and the initial narrative of Walker's arrest for shooting a police officer during a warrant attempt was dropped (Samuels et al., 2021). Consumer magazines, such as *Vanity Fair* and *O: The Oprah Magazine*, chose to feature her portrait on their September 2020 covers, honouring her life, her family, her service as a frontline medical worker, and all she hoped to be (a nurse). Elevating her life—not her death—gave readers a community space to grieve, vent, protest, but also learn about the person behind the #SayHerName and #BLM protests in 2020 (Grant et al., 2022).

As Abrahamson predicted, "This inextricable link between magazines and specific communities of interest will prove paramount in magazines' success ... if only because over the next decade it may become ever more valuable to those people who are looking for voices that speak the truth to them about the things that they believe matter" (2009, p. 2).

### *Campus media*

Recent surveys indicate growth among college-based magazines persists, establishing this medium as a valid choice for mass communication research. A 2021 survey shows more than one-third of general interest magazines boosted publication frequency since 2015 (eight), with 42% producing editions at least two to three times annually (CMA, 2021, p. 2). Additionally, those that report publishing four to five editions annually jumped to 24% in 2021 from 18% in 2015. Growth in publication frequency among two- and four-year institutions mirrors growth in page count in 2021 (CMA, 2021, p. 4).

In digital platforms, the Benchmark Survey (2021) reports more than 44% publish Web-based magazines—a decrease by half from those Web publishing in 2015. Between four-year and two-year institutions, Web magazines are more common at the former: 41% vs 18%. Notable is the decrease in this type of publication: 55% at four-year institutions but a 2% drop at two-year institutions (18). Among private schools, the data are similar: four-year private colleges host a Web-based magazine—a drop of nearly 50% since 2015. Recent growth includes the publication of fresh content to digital platforms while hosting and archiving Web versions of print editions (4, comments).

With regards to content, 73% of four-year, public colleges report Web versions mirror content of print editions; in 2015, however, content was fresh for 68% of Web-based publications. At two-year public campuses, the print and Web editions

mirror their content to four-year, private colleges. This is reflected in a 100% decrease in 2021 from 2015 (p. 19).

During the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, campus publications proved essential to their communities as 94% continued publishing, in many cases providing the only local and regional information (Nierenberg, 2020) about rates of occurrences, resources, closures, and more.

### ***Magazine elements***

On a college campus, a magazine records a moment in time. As documenters of life for a defined community, staff editorial decisions reflect campus culture as much as the editor-in-chief at that moment. The Editor's Note, Table of Contents, and Cover elements all are essential to building a magazine's voice and brand and, therefore, require much attention and intention during production.

Like consumer magazines, the Cover content of a campus magazine is meant to attract readers, ideally to entice them to pick up the edition, turn the page, and keep reading (Kitch 2001, 5). The cover image can not only define a publication, but also draw a reader into a magazine's community, thereby creating an emotional response in both dedicated and potential readers (Page, 2020; Spiker, 2017).

The Editor's Note similarly states a magazine's personality. This standing element from the editor-in-chief declares the edition's intent, perhaps highlights specific articles, introduces contributors, and often discusses ideas important to the reading community but not necessarily featured in the edition's content. It may urge a call to action. This element gifts readers insight into production processes, thus expanding the boundaries of the magazine community and offering "significant evidentiary value" (Friedman, 2014). Any analysis of editorial philosophy or news value would, therefore, involve the Editor's Note as a variable over time.

The Table of Contents, while a standing item, offers potential to further assert magazine identity and goals for an individual edition. A Table of Contents can be simple: headline and page number. Or designers can choose to feature historical, environmental, or secondary photos to highlight contents in topic blocks and further draw readers to specialised or edition-specific content; using page hierarchy design principles attaches an editorial value to those items. Given that most campus magazines likely are attached to a campus media programme housed in an academic area (Kopenhaver, 2015; Terracina-Hartman & Nulph, 2013), it can be expected that editors and designers have earned a degree of expertise in design, leading to the production of this section with intention and thereby worthy of analysis.

Research into campus media operation branches into studies of mass comm pedagogy and instruction. The teaching hospital model (Incollingo, 2017), and Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are debated as options for providing experiential learning (Brandon, 2002) for students. CofP has gained much traction post-pandemic as its four pillars—community, identity, practice, meaning—have spurred examination for persistence during remote instruction.

### ***Theoretical background***

This study is well suited to examine complex, value-laden, and uncertain issues, relying on the fifth claim of Problematic Integration theory, which states communication is the primary medium, source, and resource (Babrow, 1995) for problematic integration incidents. Such incidents occur during a struggle for meaning as humans aim to establish what they ought to believe and whether what they are inclined to believe is good or bad (Babrow, 1995, p. 5).

Problematic Integration theory was developed "to illuminate communication in relation to distinct but interrelated forms of troublesome meaning" (Kuang & Babrow, 2021, p. 234). As

developed, the theory says humans navigate and respond to happenings in the world by forming “probabilistic and evaluative orientations” (Matthias & Babrow, 2007, p. 788). A probabilistic orientation involves a belief or expectation, leading a person to ponder questions about the nature of something, its characteristics, what has happened, how might it act in the future. An evaluative orientation leads to a pragmatic consideration, such as whether an object, event, or its characteristics are good or bad (p. 789). Mathis and Babrow say communication is key to experiencing problematic integration as these two processes can blend seamlessly. Lastly, while communication can trigger a problematic integration incident for being a source of bad news and / or when a person is messenger of bad news, communication also offers resources:

For instance, communication can transform PI into a more palatable form or help an individual to reappraise the value she or he places on a particular event or object. In short, communication is not only a major source of probabilistic and evaluative meanings, it is also integral to struggles over elusive and/or troubling meanings (p. 789).

Communication can take the form of collective responses, whether it's songs, media content, prayer, poems, and other media that is shared across platforms and generations. The process is “fundamentally a communication phenomenon spread and shared by identification, sympathy, empathy, and interdependence” and “collective responses tied to communication acts and artifacts” (Gill & Babrow, 2007, pp. 136–137). Examination of this communication has value as it offers a lens into these artifacts that capture expression, perception, and introspection around moments in time.

Magazine content that addresses persistent social issues or sudden episodic strife fit the application of this theory. Scholars point to a lack of editorial distance among editors and their content as compared to other forms of media (Abrahamson,

2007); such affiliation with content allows for exploration of an issue or event on the reading audience rather than a recitation of facts surrounding an event. Gill (2007) finds magazines' focus on individuals rather than collective voices creates contradictions in discourse with readers, while Gauntlett (2008) reports that this gap is acknowledged among loyal readers who can accept these messages within the parameters of their own worldview. Scholars acknowledge the psychology involved, but apply PI to examine discourse around social issues that cannot be solved, but of which communication can connect a personal struggle to a society's broader discourse and organisation, such as a readership.

Specifically, Editors' Note, Table of Contents, and Cover all offer readers spaces to learn the intentions of the staff: they highlight topics for debate, celebrate communities, call for justice, mark milestones, dissect social complexities, give voices in profiles, bring issues to public attention, and engage with other discourse. They have done so both before and after the March 13, 2020 killing of a Black woman, Breonna Taylor, in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment.

### *Research questions*

College campus magazine staffs rarely focus their general interest magazine editions on one issue; rather, the mission of the publication [“campus life” or “arts & culture”] may be stated inside the cover, with an occasional theme, such as *Animals Issue* or *Finding Local*. Inside, readers would find a special section dedicated to this content. Student staffs have as their stated mission to reach as broad an audience as possible as they choose content; therefore, articles on trends (art, music, fashion, cars), a deep dive into history, explorations in photography and graphic illustrations, highlights on populations, and lifestyle (sports, career, social media) are common choices as such content serves to build, support, and mirror a community of readers. Such mission statements are often key to operational policy, defining the news value

of the publication. Thus, the structure of a campus magazine facilitates this study of the potential for culturally influenced changes to lead to revised commonsense meanings of a publication's news value, and, as a result, influence content decisions (Harcup & O'Neil, 2016; Bennett & Lawrence, 1995).

With prior research for guidance, (Terracina-Hartman, 2024), this study poses four research questions related to examination of college magazine content through analysis of Cover, Editor's Note columns, and Table of Contents, 2019-2022.

- RQ1: Which dominant themes appear in campus magazine content 2019–2022?
- RQ2: How frequent do themes of social justice appear in Cover content pre- and post-police killing of Breonna Taylor?
- RQ3: How frequent do themes of social justice appear in Editors' Note pre- and post-police killing of Breonna Taylor?
- RQ4: How frequent do themes of social justice appear in TOC pre- and post-police killing of Breonna Taylor?

### Methods

To contribute to the knowledge of campus media operations and the reaction to social conditions during a historical moment in time, this study selected award-winning campus magazines from three national college media competitions: Associated Collegiate Press Pacemakers, College Media Association Pinnacles, and Columbia Scholastic Press Association Crown, collecting content from winning editions published 2019 through 2022. This method builds upon prior research, which confirms the legitimacy and affiliation of student-run publications and provides access to a variety of student publications content over time (Terracina-Hartman & Nulph, 2019; Terracina-Hartman & Nulph, 2016; Terracina-Hartman & Nulph, 2013).

Using general-interest, student-run magazines that placed first, second, or third once during the study period generated

an initial list of 85 publications. Honorable Mention, Literary Magazines, and class-based entries were discarded; based upon these exclusions, N = 55 (Appendix 1). A magazine's edition, with three units (Cover, Table of Contents, and Editors' Note) is the unit of analysis; n = 215 elements were analysed. Award-winning editions were located on issuu.com and the media outlet's homepage. Entry submission was confirmed through contest winner announcements.

Using central tenets of fundamental semiotic principles (see e.g., Barthe[A1] , 1972; de Saussure, 1959) content was reviewed to reveal prominent themes. Building on prior work (Terracina-Hartman, 2024), 15 themes were identified organically after a review of contents, with topics tied to each theme to include prominent variabilities. Prominent themes containing social justice content were then selected for analysis, with measurement also for occurrences of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, #SayHerName, and #BlackLivesMatter.

List of prominent themes:

- social justice
- activism
- systematic racism
- environment
- profile: community
- profile: individual
- campus matters
- safe space / DEI
- police violence
- Findings

Theme analysis reveals frequent discussion of social issues, ranging from climate change / wildfire to immigration to LGBTQ rights to police violence. Similar to consumer publications, content features helpers, individuals, and creators. Post-George Floyd murder, the content raises questions and demands and eventually includes Breonna Taylor (Figure 1). To answer RQ1, a frequency analysis was run. Results



indicate the Profile: Community (69%, n=149) theme leads, with creator topics prominent throughout the study period. The result is not unanticipated given that some publications declare themselves as a “fashion and culture” magazine while others declare they are a “lifestyle” magazine. As this question allowed coders to select up to three themes, it is valuable to assess the frequency of co-occurrences for relationship. Noteworthy is the topic frequency tied to systemic racism / discrimination, directly pertaining to the culture wars of 2018 and social justice protests of 2020; police violence / brutality; driving while Black; police-involved shooting of Black people; and police-involved deaths of Black women: 28% (n=60). A closer look at the three elements of DEI when examined with frequency of Profiles / individuals, show that DEI appears in 79% of content (or 170), with 35% of this figure appearing in 2022 contest results. Lastly, environmental themes (conservation, climate change, pollution, drought, recycling, sustainability) account for 87 appearances, (40%), with 60% in 2019 and early 2020. With wildfires in Oregon and Northern California (Camp Fire), bush fires in Australia and Brazil, and drought in the Northeast capturing the public discourse, these themes occupied a big presence in collegiate mind space; much of college discourse centred on a civil right to a clean environment and need for generational activism in this arena, with mentions of the following: #choosetosavetheplanet #environmentaljustice. When examining the co-occurrence with Activism, the frequency of these two themes is 74, or 34%.

Examples of this discourse theme include *The Shorthorn*. In introducing “Common Ground” as a ‘Culture Edition,’ the editors write “A collection of stories painting a picture of the diverse community that makes up UTA” (fall 2020, Cover). The TOC features “Spectrum of Diversity” content illustrated with a collage of images. Additionally, a *Pursuit* cover photo features a summer 2020 protest; front and centre is a young man in a “Hands Up Don’t Shoot” posture (fall 2020). A cover line reads “Expanding the Boundaries of Social Activism,

Outreach, and Ministry.” Inside, the Table of Contents lists “A Call for Justice” (p. 3). Prominent in the accompanying photo are protesters’ signs with #SayHerName and Breonna’s image (1, 3). The *Distraction* cover image fall 2020 features a young student of color and coverline “Look at Him: Unpacking Stereotypes.” The coverline refers to special section “Being Black in America,” which begins with, “Timeline of Unjust Deaths in 2020” (TOC, pp. 4-5).

What these theme results suggest is support for fifth claim of Problematic Integration Theory: in this time, creators use communication as a mode to integrate milestone societal incidents, such as a jogger being gunned down by white racists or a mass school shooting, and offer context of these unsolvable issues for their campus-based audience. Perhaps a direct reference to a bungled no-knock warrant at Breonna Taylor’s home is absent, as it would be in a newspaper; however, the context of presenting profiles of communities and individuals with intent signals an effort at a declaration of identity and exploration into the impact within their communities. Given publications schedules for semester-based institutions, reactions to the deaths of Atatiana Jefferson, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd may appear much later in content (Terracina-Hartman, 2024).

Topics for activism theme borrow from prior research (Tyson et al., 2021) indicating Gen Z’s overall greater engagement with climate change than other generations. Pew Center’s survey listing four activities specified four items—donating, contacting elected official, volunteering, attending rallies and protests—as measured engagement. Della Volpe (2022) says this level of engagement coincides with increased levels of activism that appears to have ignited during the culture wars sparked in 2018 and after the Parkland, Florida high school shooting. In content, this discourse is visible in exhortations to be active, be accountable, take responsibility, live with intention, practice sustainability. In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown months, this discourse was

prominent in Editor's Note columns to sustain the community of practitioners as well as serve the community of readers (Gill & Babrow, 2007). In line with the fifth claim of the Problematic Integration theory, editors used mass communication to address social issues affecting the reading community while asking the reading community to read the story of individuals and respond as individuals (Gauntlett, 2008; Abrahamson, 2009).

In response to RQ2, which asks, How frequent do themes of social justice appear in Cover content pre- and post-police killing of Breonna Taylor?, researchers conducted a comparative analysis to determine prominence using 2019–2020 with 2021–2022 publications. Top topics for social justice include demonstrations, local impact, racism, and more.

Topics related to prominent themes selected for analysis:

- systematic racism: Black on campus, hate speech, discrimination
- police violence / brutality: driving while Black, violence against Black women
- profile / individual: campus member or surrounding community

- profile / student pop'n–community: campus population or surrounding community
- environment: pollution, sustainability, recovery, climate change, recycling, wildlife
- DEI / safe space: representation, accessibility, disability, equity, inclusion
- resources: supplies, food banks, clothes closets, contacts, clinics, active shooter drill,
- social justice: demonstration, local impact, protest, activism
- activism: engagement, intention, accountability, personal responsibility, inform / educate, participate
- (Atatiana, Breonna, George: when present): victims of police-involved killing
- #SayHerName
- #BlackLivesMatter

Results (n=35) show highest theme prominence between 2019–2020 centres on Profile: Community (32, 91%), (which includes "student demographics, athletics"), followed by DEI/ Safe Space (15, 44%). Social Justice appears five times (14%) with Activism and Conservation both occurring six times (17%). Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and the hashtags

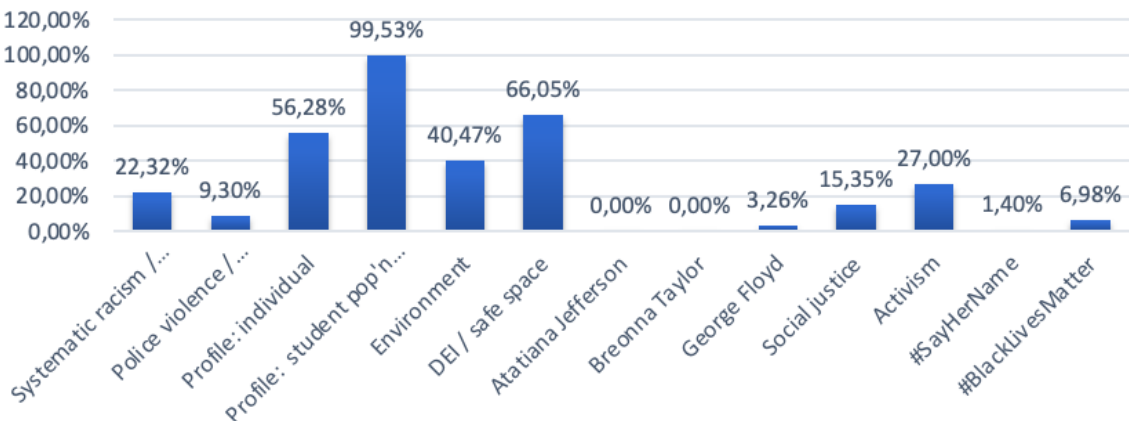


Fig. 1 Prominence of social justice themes in college magazines (2018-2022).

#SayHerName #BlackLivesMatter appear once (3%) respectively (Fig. 2), suggesting that spring editions—despite the hurdles of remote production and summer work stoppage—allowed some staffs to respond to her death with content.

Turning to magazine cover art, by comparison, covers published in 2021–2022 (n=40) showed nearly double profile content (individuals 35% and student population/community 82%), with Systemic Racism (which includes Hate Speech, Black on Campus, Discrimination) appearing with greater prominence (10,25%). DEI (15,35%), Social Justice (9, 23%), and Activism (7,17%) also increased.

Evidence of this result is visible in several publications. The *El Espejo* cover photo spring 2020 (issue 3) is of a frontline health worker, with the coverline “The Death of a Black Man Spurs Outrage Nationwide.” The TOC listing contains images from San Antonio protests, which include protester signs of Breonna Taylor in her EMT uniform and ‘No-Knock No More.’ The *Ball Bearings* cover spring 2021 (12, issue 2) is a graphic

illustration of facial, textile, and art images overlaying each other, with ‘Woven Identities’ in cutout letters. *El Sol* in summer 2020 teases “Black Men & Driving” in the TOC, with protest photos from Southern California in the description. Visible signs state #SayHerName, #BLM, and ‘Running While Black.’ *Tusk* offers ‘The Five Stages of Grief in a Police State’ in the 2021 (vol 22) TOC: photos depict protests, with ‘No Justice No Peace,’ #SayHerName, and #BLM visible. ‘Letter From the Staff’ shares the edition intent: “This year’s edition took shape over the summer of 2020 [during] ... uprising for racial justice. Because of this, three main themes emerged in our stories: Living Online, Familial Justice and Black Voices. ... Our stories also confront racism and injustice underscored and exacerbated by the pandemic ...” (p. 7).

But themes directly tied to discourse surrounding Atatiana Jefferson or Breonna Taylor (police brutality, driving while Black, Police-Involved killing of Black Women) are minimal (8%). Both #SayHerName and #BlackLivesMatter appear five times (10%) respectively.

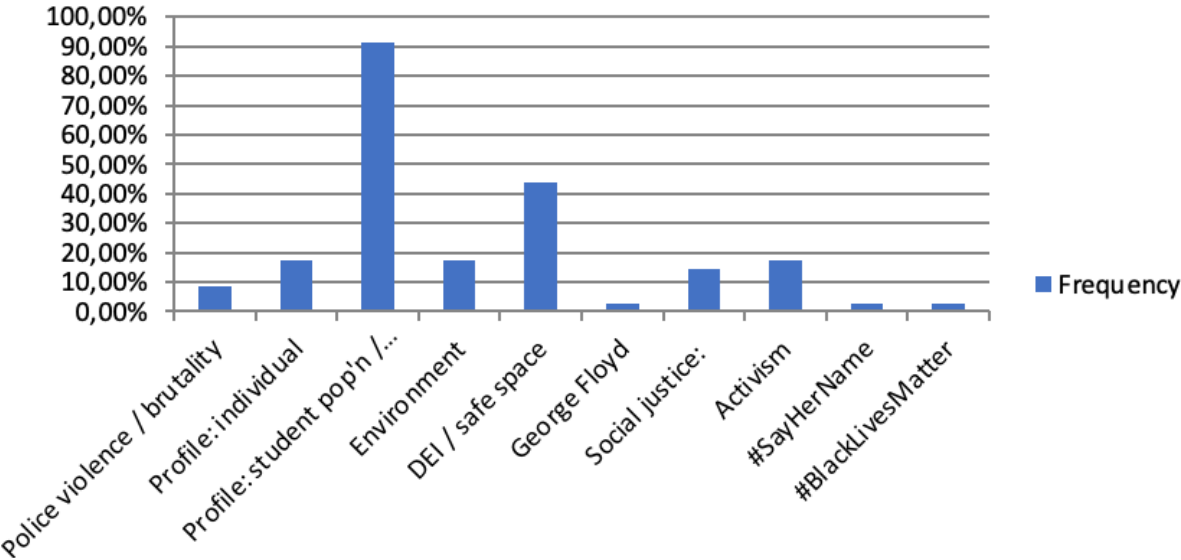


Fig. 2 Social justice on college magazines covers (2018-2020).

A magazine cover that lacks overlines or coverlines is open to interpretation (Spiker, 2015). Analysis of covers with use of graphical elements (n=75) shows those employing text (e.g., coverlines) (58, 77%); the rest (17) offered stand-alone images or photo illustrations, leaving the reading community to choose meaning. In terms of art choices, covers were equal in usage of photo (20) vs photo illustration (21) vs graphic illustration (21), accounting for 28%. Cover art, defined as "lead art" or relating to the edition's top content, accounted for 24 occurrences at 32%.

The Editor's Note is an opportunity for magazine editors to state the mission of the edition, highlight individual pieces or themes, and spotlight the culture of production as well as the times into which the magazine itself is delivered. It reflects the personality of the person at the helm as well as the goals and wishes for how it is received. Quite often, it is the last item produced and, therefore, able to introduce timely content not found elsewhere. To determine RQ3, which measures the presence of social justice themes in Editor's Note columns pre- and post-killing of Breonna Taylor, the analysis begins with prominence of themes. Post-pandemic shutdown and post-Breonna Taylor killing, the results are consistent with Gill (2007) in that social issues are addressed in terms of a smaller scope: telling stories of individuals / profiles (51%) and of communities (66%).

What does racism and social justice look like on campus and in our community? When combining Diversity + Equity + Inclusion themes, the total accounted for 86% in Editor's Notes, while 95% addressed Profiles: Community + Student Population (Fig. 3); together, these themes co-occur at 54%. The discourse of "NotSafeHomeX" appeared across editors' columns immediately after Breonna Taylor was killed (referencing a text message women often sent pre-COVID to indicate 'safe arrival'); while the hashtag persisted about 12 months, the "arriving home doesn't mean safe at home" produced content that called for activism.

Editors also expressed a direct wish for how their editions are received and read (38 of 70 columns, 54%). For example, co-editors Jocelyn Sandoval and Jose Castillon write in 'From the Editors,' "We wanted this issue to reflect the hope and strength our campus and community have shown this past year throughout all of the challenges it has thrown our way," (*El Espejo*, 2021, p. 3). The editors of *Measure* write, "After an unprecedented year, we find ourselves inspired by the words of MLK, Jr. 'The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and controversy.' We believe the same is true of women. Through examinations of our interactions, a realistic look at the changing climate, and a commitment to social justice, we seek to provide new visions of possibility and progress in Marist," (2021, p. 1). Lastly, Editor-in-Chief of *DIGMag*, Bella Arnold, writes, "I hope that you enjoy these stories of color, imagination, and spirit. And when it comes time for you to make the decision between playing it safe and following the spirit of imagination (the theme of this issue), I hope you take the leap to let yourself dream" (2022, p. 5).

By comparison, analysis showed that profiles on individuals (12,43%) and communities (19,68%) co-occurred with Student Demographics for the highest topic frequency for the Community theme in Editor's Note columns between 2019-2020 (19,68%). Also, a notable finding is the frequency of Magazine Production, Legacy, and Farewell topics in the Profile: Individuals theme (16,48%) and best wishes for future editors.

Additionally, editors in 22 of 28 columns referenced themes not found on the cover or featured in TOC content. These include: loss of future (12%); a sense of uncertainty (9%); an outreach to readers: "celebrate personal history" and "reach out to others" (8%); a call to action at the dawn of a new decade: demand action on gun safety, save the planet, and claim personal responsibility to live sustainably (take steps at home, on campus) (17%).

The Table of Contents offers magazine staff a second front page to declare intentions for an edition: an edition theme, standing items, and—through photos and graphics—what’s important. In response to RQ4, which asks which themes appeared prior to and after the police killing of Breonna Taylor, analysis shows that, post-shutdown, racism, social justice, and DEI-related themes dominated 14 (36%), 15 (38%), and 38 (99%) of magazines, yet similar to Editor’s Note content, the emphasis on community and individual profiles persisted at 35 (90%) and 37 (94%), while the focus on Environment continued 18 (46%). Also notable is Representation 20 (38%) and police brutality 14 (36%).

By comparison, the Table of Contents between 2019–2020 shows content emphasising profiles, but focuses on creators (88%) and also has equal focus on the environment: conservation, climate change, Australian bush fires and historic wildfires in the Western U.S., including the Camp Fire (40%). Lastly, Activism theme is visible in nearly 43% of all Table of Contents content, similar to Representation at 40%. This finding may reflect editors’ decisions to similarly attend to

social conditions affecting the campus community; this time period includes the police killing of Atatiana Jefferson in her home, gun safety activism of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS shooting survivors, and the ongoing culture wars against the LGBTQ+ community, Muslims, immigrants, and people of colour.

Discussion

The intent of this study is to ask what are the commonsense meanings of social justice and how and when do these appear in college lifestyle magazines? Of particular interest is a historic, unprecedented time period and whether specific events serve to trigger and / or adjust cultural relevance for the creators. Semiotic analysis is appropriate for this study as it permits a close look at discourse and detection of usage patterns. The Problematic Integration Theory is fitting as the fifth claim (communication) suits the discussion of social issues, while the environment of college media in a structured environment (newsroom) suits the examination of operations and operational changes.

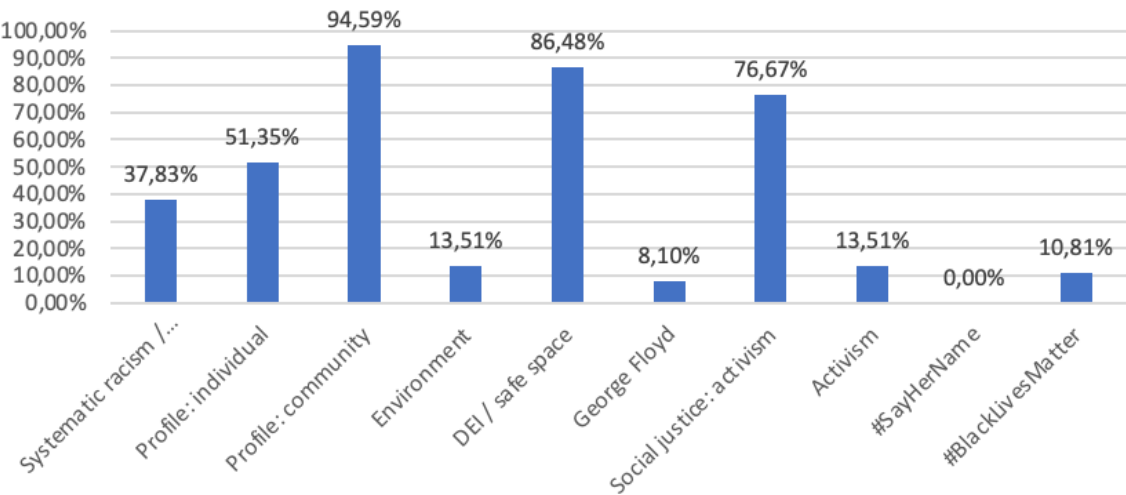


Fig. 3 Frequency of themes in Editor’s Note Content (2021-2022).

Thus, this study's value is in its potential to deepen the understanding of Community of Practice principles, in particular location and identity as student creators faced being away from their institutional "home" and away from each other. The persistence in offering an editorial voice in Editor's Note columns—appearing as a "we" and as an individual editor-in-chief speaking for the staff—confirms consistency in operations over the time period. 'Practice' was maintained despite the changing conditions involved in location and identity, which Lave and Wenger (1991) state is critical. It also confirms the student staffs' efforts to communicate directly their intentions for the edition and why; thus, they include themselves as part of the community response to social issues as well as the need to respond, whether it's with a vote or with compassion ("Being Black in America: Educate Yourself" *Distraction* fall 2020; "Identity Beyond Borders" *Ball Bearings* November 2021).

The analysis shows the difference is in content: the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice demonstrations influence content so that the discourse is culturally relevant, but consistent with operations. The focus is community, but life for the community is very different and must be discussed. Here, we see how these results exemplify the core principles of PI: "identification, sympathy, empathy, and interdependence" (Gill & Babrow, 2007, p. 136–137). Whatever readers might think about Breonna Taylor or BLM or racial justice demonstrations, they may identify or empathize when a young person with such promise is shot and killed by police officers in the sanctity of her own home.

Results show a clear pattern in responding to outside social conditions with graphics in TOC sections: of 70 in the dataset, 60% use a secondary photo featuring social justice demonstrations referencing Breonna Taylor and / or no-knock warrants. Prior research confirms visuals can elevate

**Table 1** Change in Table of Contents theme frequency: 2019-2022

Themes	2019-2020 Frequency / %		2021-2022 Frequency / %		Difference	
Systematic racism / discrimination	6.06%	2	35.88%	14	0.75	12
Police violence / brutality	9.09%	3	35.88%	14	0.64	11
Profile: individual	69.70%	23	97.43%	38	0.15	15
Profile: student pop'n / community	78.79%	45	89.74%	37	-97.56	-8
Environment	57.57%	19	46.15%	18	-27.02	-1
DEI / safe space	84.84%	28	128.00%	39	16.41	11
George Floyd	0.00%	0	5.13%	2	100	2
Social justice	27.27%	9	20.51%	8	-5.59	-1
Activism	51.51%	17	48.71%	19	5.56	2
#SayHerName	3.03%	1	0.00%	0	-3.03	-1
#BlackLivesMatter	3.03%	1	12.82%	5	66.67	4

reader attention to content, but social issues offering readers a chance to respond as a community with humanity is often the distinction between magazine content and newspaper content. The medium is not the message, but delivery can offer a difference (Abrahamson 2009).

Cover art varied between a standalone photo (44) with or without coverlines and an illustration (31) with no text. These choices leave the staffs with a lot of creative space and the readers with a lot of interpretive space. Cover art sets the tone for the edition and generally is credited for drawing readers to continue on and turn some pages (Spiker 2003). Photos captured protests and demonstrations; what we did not see is the commodification of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Atatiana Jefferson, or others lost to unjust killings. Photos showed orderly demonstrations, not chaos. Illustrations depicted graphics introducing sections like “Black Voices” (Tusk 2021) or “Spectrum of Diversity” (Shorthorn 2019).

The answer to the long-standing rhetorical question in journalism, “How do you tell the big stories? You tell the small stories,” is the guiding principle for operations of general interest magazines. Results show this principle is visible in content changes in the two time periods. Post-police killing, we see a significant emphasis on story telling of individuals sharing their family traditions, neighbourhood life, and local community landmarks, and less emphasis on Arts & Entertainment and hobbyists and faculty spotlights. The shift in storytelling is marked, but also purposeful. Some editors state it directly: *El Sol*’s “Courage” edition profiled “advocates who continue to fight for justice, and against racism, erasure, violence, and murder” (Summer 2020) and *Pursuit* released “Expanding the Boundaries of Social Activism, Outreach and Ministry” (fall 2020).

Lastly, while this study’s results don’t position Breonna Taylor’s name as frequently or as prominently as consumer magazines, such as *Vanity Fair* or *O*, it must be noted that Breonna Taylor’s death was not highlighted among social justice protests until after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020; many college publications did not publish on regular schedules in summer 2020 so the earliest content appeared in Editor’s Note columns, which are the last items produced before an edition goes to press. Sometimes these editions didn’t post online until fall 2020. This study’s results shows that content choices reflect an intent to respond to the social impact of her death.

While this study seeks to examine college magazine learning communities and production, certain limitations do exist; analysis of these winning publications over the study period, rather than during an entry in an award-winning year, would yield a richer picture of content decisions and the factors that prompt change. It also would account for changes in staffing or funding over academic years due perhaps to administrative or faculty shifts.

Future research could build on this massive dataset with surveys of campus media advisers and student editors about publishing and production decisions during this time period. Additional analysis could include further examination of graphics usage, locations, type of institution, and comparison of content on digital platforms vs. print editions (home page vs. front page, for example). Also, reviewing engagement during this time period could reveal feedback on the magazine content and how editors responded—either to commenters or with content decisions—and could add additional layers of understanding to the Community of Practice theory. These survey results also could offer additional applications of Community of Practice theory and reveal further variabilities in campus magazine operations and whether COVID-induced changes persist.

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**Appendix 1**

1 El Sol	2 Owl Magazine
3 The Summit	4 Baked
5 Echo (Columbia College)	6 Drake (Iowa)
7 The Vista (Greenville University)	8 Collegian Times, Los Angeles City College (CA)
9 Pacific Rim Magazine	10 The Sentinel, North Idaho College
11 The Bleed (2-year) (Pa)	12 Ball Bearings (C)
13 SHEI Magazine	14 Common Ground -- The Shorthorn Culture Edition
15 KRNL, University of Kentucky (C)	16 The Bull Magazine, Los Angeles Pierce College
17 PRM, Langara College	18 The Current, Amarillo College
19 Distraction Magazine (Miami)	20 DAMchic, (P) Oregon State U
21 FORM Magazine, Duke	22 MPJ / (Syracuse)
23 Tusk	24 Pursuit, Cal Baptist
25 Ampersand (CSPA)	26 Ball Bearings (C)
27 City Scene (San Diego City College)	28 Countenance, East Carolina University (C)
29 Crimson Quarterly, University of Oklahoma (C)	30 Dollars & Sense, Baruch College (C)
31 Etc. (2-year) (C)	32 Envision (Pa)
33 El Espejo (Pa)	34 Focus (C)
35 Flux (C)	36 FM/AM (C)
37 Measure, Marist College (C)	38 OR University of Oregon (C)
39 The Point (Biola College) (Pa)	41 SCAN, Savannah College of Design--Atlanta (C)
42 The Stephens Life (Pa)	43 Talisman, Western Kentucky University
44 Tempo (Pa)	45 TWO (Pa)
46 Uhuru (Pa)	47 Warrior Life (El Camino) (C)
48 Windhover, NC State, Raleigh, NC (C)	48 Woodcrest
49 Blush, FIT	50 Manhappenin' K State
51 Square 95	52 DIG Mag (Cal State Long Beach)
53 Textura	54 UNF Spinnaker
55 Inside Fullerton (Fullerton City College)	

*Note: Pacific Rim Magazines becomes PRM*