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**Chinese-Language Television News in the U.S.A:
A Cross-Cultural Examination of
News Formats and Sources**

by

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**Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications,
Miami, FL, August, 2002**

Yih-Ling Liu graduated with a master's degree in communications from Cal State Fullerton. Tony Rimmer is a professor of communications in the Department of Communications at Cal State Fullerton. This paper comes from Yih-Ling Liu's thesis. Dr. Rimmer was her thesis adviser. Drs. Ed Fink & Fred Zandpour served as thesis committee members.

Abstract

Chinese-Language Television News in the U.S.A: A Cross-Cultural Examination of News Formats and Sources

by

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To study the effects of culture on ethnic news content, hypotheses were proposed based on how several cultural dimensions might influence news format and source of U.S., Taiwanese, and Chinese TV news materials broadcast to the southern California Chinese community. Cultural variables used in the hypotheses were power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, high and low context, and mono and polychronic.

When compared to TV news from Taiwan, U.S. news edited by ethnic Chinese journalists at a Chinese-language television station was found to be shorter, more sensational, to contain less information, fewer government sources and fewer sources in general, to contain more female sources, and use fewer routine channels. News from mainland China was found to be different from that of Taiwan in that it showed less conflict, conveyed less information, and was reported at a slower pace.

Culture seems to have influenced the way ethnic Chinese journalists produce and present TV news. The cultural dimension utilized in this study provided a useful tool for comparing the effects of culture on ethnic news media.

**Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the
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Chinese-Language Television News in the U.S.A: A Cross-Cultural Examination of News Formats and Sources¹

Introduction

The Chinese community in southern California can see daily, locally produced, Chinese-language television news offering material that has originated in mainland China, from Taiwan, and in the U.S.

This study began with a simple premise – we wondered if there might be identifiable features in TV news originating from these three countries that might reflect cultural characteristics of each country. We imagined a continuum where U.S.-originated news material at one end might show production values highlighting pace and personality and a wide variety in source type, while we might be able to place at the other end of the continuum the more government elite-centered and slower-paced TV news material from mainland China. And all this produced by U.S.-based Chinese journalists presumably immersed in the acculturation process themselves.

And what of Taiwan's position on this continuum? To what degree might that country's closer ties with the U.S. influence the way its TV news was presented? Beyond the more readily apparent issues of pacing and source type, we wondered if some theoretical ideas from comparative culture developed by Hall (1983, 1976) and Hofstede (1991) might help explain the differences we saw in TV news from these three countries.

This study asks whether culture is associated with TV news production forms, and attempts to identify some of the ways that culture might have an effect. More speculatively, the study considers whether western news production values reach back across the Pacific and may have an impact on the way TV news is produced in other countries.

Ethnic media can play a significant acculturative function for new immigrants. Most studies in this field emphasize the influence of ethnic media on the immigrant audience, while the impact of acculturation on the content of ethnic media is seldom mentioned. This study considers how acculturation processes might shape the content and form of ethnic media.

It is ethnic journalists who are typically responsible for the news content of ethnic media. These journalists are often immigrants themselves, and therefore are influenced by the acculturative processes in their new country. As a result, their ideology of news work may be different from that of the journalists in their country of origin, as well as in the majority culture in which they now live. Acculturation may be involved in the agenda-building processes of ethnic news production by influencing the way ethnic journalists select and present news stories for their audiences.

¹The authors wish to thank KSCI-TV, Los Angeles, and the managers of *World Report* for allowing the first author to observe their news room and talk with journalists and editors, and Drs. Ed Fink and Fred Zandpour, committee members on the thesis (Liu, 1995) from which this paper is drawn.

The process of acculturation involves shifts that occur in attitudes, values, and/or behaviors of minority members toward majority cultures. A set of cultural factors is proposed here to identify ethnic differences and to explain the acculturation process. These factors may influence news formats and source selection, thereby shaping to some degree the content of television news. By examining the degree to which ethnic media content is shaped by the majority culture, and by assessing to what degree ethnic media have maintained the original culture, we may better understand part of the agenda-building process of the ethnic media.

This study explored how cultural factors might shape the news formats and source selection patterns of *World Report*, a Chinese-language TV news program broadcast by KSCI-TV, an international TV channel in Los Angeles, California. *World Report* contains a section on U.S. news which is edited by *World Report* journalists. At the time of this study *World Report* contained Taiwanese and Chinese news sections which were edited separately by journalists in Taiwan and Mainland China with some story selection by *World Report* journalists. To understand the effect culture might have on news content a comparison among the U.S., Taiwanese and Chinese sections of *World Report* was made using concepts of culture drawn from the cross-cultural studies literature.

Review of Literature and Argument

Acculturation and Ethnic Media

Acculturation is a process involving the changes in attitudes, values or behaviors of members of one cultural group towards the standard of the other cultural group (Gordon, 1964). It has been described as the continuous process by which the immigrant is socialized into a host culture, so as to be directed towards a greater compatibility with, or “fitness” into the host culture, and ultimately, toward assimilation (Kim, 1982).

Ethnic media are considered to perform a useful function in the acculturation process by bridging the culture gap between the country of origin and the immigrants’ new country (Zubrzycki, 1958). On the one hand ethnic media have been observed to perform a gatekeeping function, serving as vehicles for immigrants to learn about and adapt to the host culture (Hur, 1981; Marzolf, 1979). In addition, ethnic media, especially the broadcast media, provide entertainment and relaxation for community members that help relieve the pressures of dealing with the host environment (Warshauer, 1966).

Previous studies about acculturation and ethnic media emphasize the ethnic media’s influence on immigrants. We were not able to identify any studies which discuss the impact of acculturation on the content and form of ethnic media. The present study addresses this apparent deficiency in the media and acculturation literature. We explore here the degree to which ethnic media content might be shaped by the majority culture, and to what degree ethnic media appear to have maintained the original culture.

A caution should be noted here – acculturation is a process, so it requires longitudinal data for a complete evaluation. The present study draws on acculturation theory in order to connect to the literature.

But we do not evaluate acculturation per se. Rather we attempt to identify and test the relevance of cultural factors as indicators of acculturation. To do this we apply cross-sectional data. Cross-sectional data are not as causally persuasive as longitudinal data (Cox, 1992), but given our goal here of locating cross-sectional categories on an already developed acculturation continuum, we assume the quality of our data are sufficient to meet the goals of our study.

The Southern California Chinese Community and its Media

There were estimated to be about 308,000 Chinese in the five-county greater Los Angeles area of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernadino and Ventura counties (U.S. Census Bureau (1990)) at the time of this study (1995). About 84 percent reported they spoke Mandarin or Cantonese at home (KSCI-TV, 1993). Additionally, 45,000 people immigrated to the U.S. each year from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (*American Demographics*, 1989).

There are at least 27 Chinese print media (18 newspapers and 9 magazines) and 12 Chinese electronic media (eight television stations and four radio stations) in southern California (Lin, 2000). Of 15 daily Chinese newspapers in Los Angeles, nine claimed a daily circulation in 1990 of 50,000 or more (ACTV, 1990).

Two radio stations in Los Angeles, one AM and one FM, were broadcasting programs in Chinese at the time of this study. Two Chinese-language TV news programs, *World Report* and *Chinese American Newscast* were broadcast by KSCI-TV (Channel 18) and KCRA-TV (Channel 62), respectively. KSCI's *World Report* is the subject of this study.

KSCI is the largest multi-ethnic TV station in southern California. The station provides programming to various immigrant communities in the Los Angeles A.D.I. *World Report* is a live, one-hour, prime time newscast, broadcast in Mandarin. From its affiliation with the ABC network, and through satellite feeds from mainland China and Taiwan, *World Report* features international and national news, with reports on Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan. Because all the journalists and most of the advertisers on *World Report* originally came from Taiwan, the news tends to be geared to audiences from Taiwan more than those from mainland China.

News Format

TV news programs are characterized by a lack of diversity of content (Atwater, 1989; Foote & Steele, 1986; Riffe, Ellis, Rogers, Ommeren & Woodman, 1986). One of the factors affecting this media consonance is the uniformity of journalist views (Graber, 1974, 1976). Graber argues that journalists share a common socialization process, a sense of what is newsworthy, and how this information should be presented. Altheide (1976) and Epstein (1973) have also argued that the organization of news production, especially TV news, also contributes to the lack of diversity of media content. TV news production is a quasi-industrial process. The news stories broadcast each day are the results of a long evolution toward common purposes of scheduling priorities and the use of news formats and sources.

Format, the “grammar” of media, refers to the way information is selected organized and presented (Altheide & Snow, 1991). The consonance of TV news, which refers to the similarity of news topics and the treatment of stories among TV newscasts, can be understood more clearly by focusing on the format of the communication rather than on content only (Altheide, 1987, 1991), since TV news has more technological, economic, and time constraints than other media (Dunwoody & Shields, 1986; Epstein (1973).

In the U.S. the association of “visualness” and conflict with story brevity has led to stories that do not always make sense (Altheide, 1985). The unique news values of TV, coupled with an entertainment dimension has resulted in the development of news formats that are more compatible with rules for attracting the largest number of viewers, at the expense of doing deeper, more complete, more consistent and more accurate reports (Altheide, 1991). Other studies have charged TV news with being preoccupied with sensational and human interest stories at the expense of stories about important public affairs (Altheide, 1991; Ostroff & Sandell, 1989).

These constraints on news story format suggest three factors that might be examined in assessing how culture affects the news story format: The duration of the news report and the information it contains, the conflictual levels of information segments within the news report, and the extent to which elements of human interest and sensationalism have been incorporated into the form of the reporting.

News Sources

The use of common news sources also leads to consonance in news coverage. Source influence on news values can be considered in the context of agenda-building, which focuses on how the media interact with other institutions in society to create issues of public concern (Weaver & Elliott, 1985).

Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazzarella and Rakow (1989) found government officials as the most frequent source on network TV news. Berkowitz (1987) reported a similar finding in his study of both network and local TV news.

Sources who are successful in the TV news agenda building process make their information conform to the media’s needs. For example, government officials have long grown accustomed to planning press conferences to gain maximum press coverage and to developing information characteristics favorable to the news gathering process (Berkowitz, 1987). Consequently, journalists rely heavily on elite sources (Brown et al., 1987; Stempel & Culbertson, 1984) since elite sources, especially public officials, are more likely to be available, suitable and reliable. As a result, the media reflect a world determined by those who have power (Molotch & Lester, 1974; Whitney et al., 1989).

Another limiting factor in news diversity results from the practices of gathering information by journalists. There are three different channels by which information reaches journalists: routine, informal, and enterprise (Sigal, 1973). Routine channels include official proceedings, press releases and press conferences. Informal channels include background briefings, leaks, and nongovernmental proceedings.

Enterprise channels include spontaneous events, and interviews and independent research executed by reporters.

According to Brown et al. (1987), when news media use routine channels, they tend to allow the source more control over their news product than when enterprise channels are used. However, several studies found that journalists usually gather news stories through routine channels (Berkowitz, 1987; Drew, 1972; Sigal, 1973). Each medium, with its own wire-service subscriptions, bureaus and beats, might be seen as part of the news net. Reporters are placed by their news media at legitimated institutions, where news is presumed most likely to occur, at the expense of locations and sources not in the net (Tuchman, 1978). Thus, when reporters spend most of their time covering scheduled events, they have effectively left news selection decisions to official news sources (Drew, 1972; Sigal, 1973).

Wire service is a routine source. Consensus on news reports has been attributed to widespread use of the major wire services (Graber, 1974, 1976; Luttbeg, 1983; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The wires not only set the boundaries within which selections are made, but they also cue journalists as to the proper distribution of stories within those boundaries (Whitney & Becker, 1982). In this case, the decisions on news selection are attributed to a relatively few editors operating at the wire services. Stone (1986) has argued, however, that editors who experience similar constraints in time and production would likely produce similar news content.

Gender representation has also been considered by several researchers to be biased and to pose limits at the level of source diversity (Whitney et al., 1989). Men have been found to be predominant over women as news sources. It is likely that television reflects the news of “knowns” in power centers, and they are predominantly men (Whitney et al., 1989).

Based on these studies, there are three factors to consider when examining how culture can affect source selection for a news story: Source affiliation of the journalists and reporters, channels through which journalists and reporters obtain information for their reports, and the gender of news sources.

These factors will be used as dependent variables for examining the influence of culture on news source.

Cultural Values

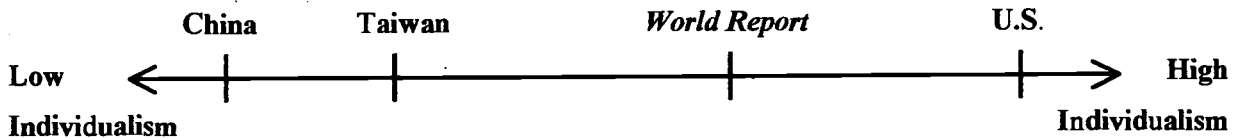
The notion of “culture” relates to how the world is perceived, organized, communicated (Hall, 1983), learned (Hofstede, 1991) and expected by an identity group (Hall, 1976). Collier and Thomas (1988) defined culture as a historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings, identifiable through norms and beliefs shared by a people.

No part of our lives is exempt from culture’s influence. Cultural values of people working in media affect their daily practices, and this reaches to media content. Gurevitch, Curran & Woollacott (1982) argue that the content of media news is subservient to the dominant culture. We might assume then, that Chinese ethnic media in the U.S., based on a culture different from that of the majority society, may express a distinctively Chinese ideology in their journalism. However, Chinese-language news broadcasts in the U.S.

also may differ from those of mainland China or Taiwan. Differences in cultural values between the U.S. and mainland China or Taiwan may affect the news production process of these news broadcasts. One way to visualize this difference might be to consider culture as a continuum. By way of illustration Exhibit 1 does this for the dimension of individualism, one of the cultural dimensions discussed in the following section. Mainland China and the U.S. are assumed to be located at the ends of this continuum with Taiwan and *World Report* being located in the middle of the continuum. Since journalists working for *World Report* are mostly Taiwanese Americans, we can expect that *World Report* falls between Taiwan and the U.S. Taiwan is more westernized than China. Therefore, we may predict China to be less individualistic than Taiwan. When other culture dimensions are considered their continua might occupy other positions such that a three-dimensional space might be constructed which accommodates all the culture dimensions considered here.

Exhibit 1

A Continuum Proposing Relative Degrees of Individualism Among Different Cultures & *World Report*



Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991) identified four cultural dimensions that can be used to compare and contrast cultures. These cultural dimensions have been applied in the study of interpersonal communication (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

In examining a multi-national organization cross-culturally, Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991), found that cultural differences among nations exist with regard to values about power and inequality, a phenomenon he calls "Power Distance"; with regard to ways of dealing with the uncertainties in life, which he calls "Uncertainty Avoidance"; with regard to the relationship between the individual and the group, which he calls "Individualism-Collectivism"; and with respect to the degree of assertiveness or nurturance of a society and the social roles expected from men or women, which he calls "Masculinity-Femininity."

In addition to Hofstede's (1980, 1983, 1991) research on dimensions of culture, Hall's (1976, 1983) culture dimensions of "Context of Communication" (low/high context) and "Perception of Time" (mono/polychronic time) have been found to serve as a useful theoretical foundation in accounting for communication style differences across a range of cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1988). A number of cross-cultural studies have provided support for Hall's observation of low- and high-context cultures (Adelman & Lustig, 1981; Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). The two types of cultural time, monochronic time and polychronic time, have also been helpful in understanding the tempo and time communication behavior of a cultural group (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984).

Exhibit 2 illustrates the comparison of these six cultural dimensions between Taiwan and the U.S. The scores for the first four dimensions were computed by Hofstede from data gathered in over 50 countries, including the three Chinese areas of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore (1980, 1983, 1991). Further, the absence of Hofstede scores for mainland China suggests that the present study should focus primarily on cross-cultural differences between Taiwan and the U.S.

Exhibit 2

The Cultural Dimensions of Taiwan and the United States*

| Cultural Dimensions | US | Taiwan |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Power Distance | 40 | 88 |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | 46 | 69 |
| Individualism | 91 | 17 |
| Masculinity | 62 | 45 |
| Low/High Context | Low context | High context |
| Mono/Polychronic Time | Monochronic | Polychronic |

* The scores represent values of the cultural indexes. They were developed by Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991), and the low/high context and mono/polychronic time ideas were developed from Hall & Hall (1990).

Power Distance

Power distance is the extent to which a society accepts that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1983). People in high-power distance cultures are more likely to expect clear directions as opposed to seeking factual evidence and reasoning in relation to a particular course of action. This is because in high-power distance cultures, recommendations of authority figures such as parents, teachers and managers are obeyed much more than those in low-power distance cultures, which have less tolerance for authority (Hofstede, 1991).

Hofstede reported Taiwan to be a culture that has a higher score of 88 in power distance than that of the United States' score of 40. We assume, therefore, that Taiwanese journalists will be more sensitive to the social status of communicators and will show a tendency to report more authorities as sources than will journalists in the U.S.

Hypothesis 1: TV news stories from Taiwan will use more government officials as news sources than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which the members of a society feel threatened by ambiguous situations. Cultures with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance need and create formal rules and regulations,

rely more on the advice of experts, and lack tolerance for deviant behaviors or ideas (Hofstede, 1980; Rubin, 1992).

Sigal (1986) argued that journalists “cope with uncertainty by continuing to rely on authoritative sources.” From Sigal’s argument we assume that since Taiwan has a higher Hofstede score (69, see Exhibit 2) on uncertainty avoidance than the U.S. (46), Taiwanese journalists will rely more on authoritative sources than U.S. journalists do. This assumption can also be tested in the first hypothesis proposed earlier.

As to news format, Taiwanese journalists are more likely to present concordant stories in order to avoid uncertainty, which is considered likely to cause uneasiness among the audience. A concordant story here means the information segments in a story are not in conflict with each other. Conflict as a news element seems more acceptable to the American audience, which is more likely to tolerate ambiguous situations than the Taiwanese audience. Thus, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 2: TV news stories from Taiwan will be more concordant (less conflictual) than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Individualism/Collectivism

Individualism/collectivism is a major dimension of cultural variability isolated by theorists across several disciplines (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Marsella, DeVos & Hsu, 1985; Triandis, 1986). Individualism stands for a preference for a loosely knit social framework in society in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. Collectivism stands for a preference for a tightly knit social framework in which individuals can expect their relatives, clan, or other in-groups to look after them, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivistic cultures emphasize goals, needs and views of the in-group over those of the individual; the social norms of the in-group, rather than individual pleasure; shared in-group beliefs, rather than unique individual beliefs; and a value on cooperation with in-group members, rather than maximizing individual outcomes (Gudykunst, 1988; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Rubin, 1992).

In Hofstede’s scores from Exhibit 2, the higher the individualism/collectivism index of a country, the more individualistic it is. Individualistic cultures like the U.S. (Hofstede’s score=91) tend to value individual pleasure over order and duty (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Rubin, 1992). Based on such characteristics of individualist cultures, we assume that news from the U.S. will tend to emphasize entertainment values, and contain more sensationalism and human interest stories. Sensationalism and human interest stories here refer to those involving crime, violence, natural disasters, accidents and fires, along with amusing, heartwarming, shocking or curious vignettes about people in the area (Adams, 1978).

In contrast, journalists in collectivistic countries such as Taiwan (Hofstede score= 17) will show a strong desire for group harmony. They will be more likely to avoid conflicts in news stories than will journalists in the U.S. (Hofstede score=91). There are two types of conflict in a story: one is presentation of conflictual information within the story; the other is the story topic itself offered as a controversial piece of

information to the public. The type of conflict proposed in Hypothesis 2, which is that there will be less conflict in news stories from Taiwan than those from U.S. TV, is conflictual information within the story. Newsroom observation suggested that the limited amount of story selection exercised by *World Report* journalists on TV news from Taiwan precluded us from considering conflict associated with story topic. We do not, therefore, address conflict associated with story topic.

Furthermore, we can assume that television news in Taiwan will tend to take on more responsibility for social harmony by focusing on a “disclosure of information function” for news. It will provide more information than entertainment, meaning more reports about public affairs rather than human interest stories. To convey more information, stories from Taiwan are expected to be longer and more informative than those from U.S. TV news. To make the news stories longer and more informative, it is also expected that Taiwanese news stories will convey information from more sources than will those from the U.S. TV news.

Hypotheses 3 through 5 are formulated based on the comparison of news media between individualist and collectivist cultures:

Hypothesis 3: TV news stories from the U.S. will devote more time to sensationalism and human interest stories than will stories from Taiwanese TV news.

Hypothesis 4: TV news stories from Taiwan will last longer and contain more information than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Hypothesis 5: TV news stories from Taiwan will use more sources in each story than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Masculinity/Femininity

Masculinity is the valuing of assertiveness, things and money over people, quality of life, and nurturance (Hofstede, 1980). Cultures high in masculinity differentiate sex roles clearly, while cultures low in masculinity (i.e., high in femininity) tend to have fluid sex roles. For example, men are supposed to be assertive and women nurturing in highly masculine societies. In low masculine societies, however, men need not be assertive, but can also take on nurturing roles.

The scores developed by Hofstede (Exhibit 2) indicate the degree of masculinity of a country: the higher the score, the more masculine the country. In the U.S., the format of news reporting may be influenced by its masculine quality with its Hofstede score as high as 62. In the assertiveness/nurturance aspect, for example, this might be manifested by male anchors taking care of the hard news, which consists of the straight, factual accounts of the day’s events, while female anchors might report softer news, which may appeal to people’s curiosity, amusement, skepticism, and amazement, or involve the audience emotionally (Dominick, Wurtzel, & Lometti, 1975). Since Taiwanese culture is more feminine (Hofstede masculinity score of 45), both female and male journalists are expected to report hard and soft news equally.

Hofstede (1979) argued that in feminine countries there are more women authority figures. We can assume that more female authorities will serve as sources in the news production processes of Taiwanese TV

news. In other words, the source's gender is expected to be more balanced in Taiwanese news than in that of the U.S.

Hypothesis 6: TV news stories from Taiwan will have a higher proportion of female sources than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Low and High-Context

According to Hall (1976), culture provides a “highly selective screen” between us and the outside world. Culture influences what stimuli we take in and what we ignore. It also provides a “screen” that influences how we encode messages. The way in which messages are encoded and decoded depends on the context of communication. In order to illustrate how cultures differ with respect to context, Hall draws a distinction between cultures characterized by high-context messages and those characterized by low-context messages.

People in high-context cultures have extensive information networks among family, friends, colleagues and clients. A high-context communication is one in which little has to be said or written because most of the information is either in the physical environment or within the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit part of the message. This type of communication is frequent in a collectivistic culture. A low-context communication, on the other hand, is one in which the mass of information is vested in the explicit communication code. This is typical of individualist cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Those in high-context cultures, then, are seen as being committed to people and human relationships. They do not require much in-depth information. People in low-context cultures are seen as being committed to their duties and need detailed background information (Hall & Hall, 1990).

People in Taiwan, a high-context culture (Hall & Hall, 1990), tend to focus on “Who says it?” instead of “What he says” in the communication process. People in the U.S., a low-context culture, may pay more attention to the message itself. This supports the earlier expectation that news from Taiwan will use more authorities as sources than news from the U.S. Additionally, reporters in Taiwan, tending to be bounded by their social relationships, are assumed to rely more heavily on routine channels than do reporters in the U.S.

Hypothesis 7: TV news stories from Taiwan will have more sources originating through routine channels than will stories from U.S. TV news.

Monochronic and Polychronic Time

Hall (1976) has developed two distinct notions of time associated with culture: monochronic and polychronic. Monochronic cultures pay attention to and do only one thing at a time, following a linear activity form. Monochronic time emphasizes schedules, segmentation and promptness. People from polychronic cultures, however, are seen as capable of performing several tasks at once, not adhering to strictly sequential schedules and presentation of information (Hall & Hall, 1990). The tempo of monochronic time, then, is faster than that of polychronic time.

Americans are seen as being monochronic and Taiwanese, in contrast, are polychronic (Hall, 1976). Although both American and Taiwanese television journalists are engaged in routine tasks characterized by linear presentation form and time constraints, the duration of information segments of a story are expected to be different between these two cultures. Time for U.S. journalists tends to be compartmentalized into short segments where stories are told at a fast pace, while Taiwanese journalists, whose tempo is comparatively slower, are likely to devote more time to present each information segment within news stories. Therefore, we expect the duration of information segments of a story to be shorter in U.S. TV news than in Taiwanese news.

Hypothesis 8: The duration of information segments will be longer in TV news stories from Taiwan than in stories from U.S. TV news.

In summary, to understand how the U.S. culture differs from that of Taiwan, and how these differences may affect Chinese-language based news programs in the U.S., several cultural variables have been identified that may affect aspects of news format and source use. According to research by Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991) and Hall (1976), the degree to which different cultures accept authority, react to ambiguous situations, weigh the importance of individuality, differentiate sex roles, and perceive and use time are all factors that may affect news work. Therefore, these cultural variables are used here as the basis for formulating and testing hypotheses on the differences in news reports between Taiwanese and U.S. media.

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were utilized to test the study's hypotheses. Observation and interviews, which are common qualitative techniques, may provide data rich in detail and subtlety. However, they suffer from observer/interviewer bias, and the results of such studies might not be generalizable (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). On the other hand, a quantitative study, such as content analysis, may allow results to be generalized to the entire population under study. Another advantage of quantitative studies is that the use of numbers and methods of mathematical analysis allows greater precision in reporting results. A disadvantage of doing an entirely quantitative study is that in the absence of information from direct observation, numerical results may be more difficult to interpret and thus may be misleading. Therefore, combining both qualitative and quantitative method may provide a greater, more complete and accurate understanding of the situation under study (Berkowitz, 1989, 1990).

Sample

A quantitative content analysis was undertaken with data gathered in two constructed five-day weeks (Monday through Friday) from January 1995 through March 1995 from *World Report*, a Chinese-language TV news program broadcast in southern California. The data were gathered from January 1995 on in order to avoid extensive election coverage in Taiwan from June to December 1994. It was thought that the election

focus in 1994 might limit the generalizability of the study. No data were gathered from Saturdays and Sundays because *World Report* broadcasts only on weekdays.

This method of constructed week sampling, which is stratified by day of the week to avoid oversampling individual weekdays, has been recommended by Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (1993) as effective in content analysis. Although day-to-day story continuity is lost in these kinds of constructed weeks, this method of collecting data satisfies the conditions for random sampling.

A starting number was randomly chosen from a table of random numbers to represent one day in the constructed weeks. Nine other random numbers were chosen, each representing a different weekday within the two hypothetical weeks. The data collection period began on January 12, 1995 and ended on March 29, 1995. The two constructed weeks represent a population of news coverage over the first three months of the year. We do not consider here whether our sample can represent *World Report* broadcast for the rest of the year.

The Chinese language newscasts that were collected over the constructed weeks were each one hour long. The news hour was split into three distinct sections. The first section covered U.S. and international news obtained from the ABC network news feed. News from Taiwan was covered in the second section. The last section covered news from mainland China. The U.S. news section was edited by *World Report* journalists, while the editorial work on the other two sections was done by editors in Taiwan and mainland China.

Some story selection work in these sections was done by the editors of *World Report*. In order to compare U.S. and Taiwanese news, coding of news variables was performed on the first two sections of the news hour. The section on news from mainland China also allowed us to make comparisons among U.S., Taiwanese and Chinese news. The absence of culture scores from Hofstede for mainland China meant the differences in news format and source between mainland China and the U.S./Taiwan may not be assumed to result from cultural influences. However, they may give us some clues about the culture patterns of mainland China. Comparisons made in this study are derived only from within *World Report*, since this study concentrates on Chinese-language newscasts which are targeted to the Chinese audience. U.S. TV news is targeted to the general population, so it was not analyzed here. It was recorded, however, for qualitative comparative purposes.

Units of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis was the “News Story” which was defined as “any topic introduced by the anchorman coupled with any report or reports by other correspondents on the same topic and any concluding remarks by the anchorman” (Fowler & Showalter, 1974, p. 713). Additionally, the amount of information in a story was coded. “Information” was measured by the number of “information units (IUs)” (Altheide, 1985), which is synonymous with the “information segments” concept within a story. The functional definition for

an IU was “a statement linking an actor with an action to an object” (Altheide, 1985). For example, a story on the federal budget might contain these separate information units: one that refers to the President’s policy, one about opposition party reaction, one on an angle on inflation as presented by a reporter, and one that is a concluding statement by the anchorperson. Information units tend to be done with visuals, rather than merely having an anchor person make a statement (Altheide, 1987).

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables used in this study are described briefly here in relation to the hypotheses in which they will be tested:

Hypothesis 1 tests for the types of sources used by the news reports. Source affiliation, the dependent variable tested here, is divided into three categories: government, group/institution and private individual.

Hypothesis 2 tests whether the news reports contain conflictual information within the same story. The degree of concordance of IUs in the news reports is analyzed.

Hypothesis 3 tests whether or not the nature of the news reports are sensationalistic. This is done by determining whether or not the news stories fall into the categories of crime or human interest.

Hypothesis 4 tests the duration of news reports and the number of IUs used per news story.

Hypothesis 5 tests for the number of sources used per news story.

Hypothesis 6 tests for the gender of sources used in the news stories.

Hypothesis 7 tests for which source channels were used most often in news stories. There are three different source channels coded in this study: routine channels, informal channels and enterprise channels.

Hypothesis 8 tests for the duration of IUs in each of the news stories in seconds.

Independent Variables

Independent variables were defined using the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1991) and Hall (1976, 1983). They are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, low-/high-context, and mono/polychronic time (Exhibit 2).

Coding and Intercoder Reliability Testing

The first author coded all the data and, following training, two other coders reviewed selected samples of the material sufficient to allow coder reliability tests to be executed (Holsti, 1969).²

Overall average intercoder reliability for all cultural variable among the coders was 95%. Agreement for IU concordance was lower at 85.6%, but was accepted as meeting Kassarijian’s (1977) 85% agreement. IU concordance was the only variable coded on a 4-point scale. The coding process here tended to be more subjective and depended more on personal judgment than did the coding patterns of other variables.

² A document offering more detailed operational definitions for each variable, copies of the codebook, and coding sheet are available from the second author.

Methods of Analysis

Cultural variables in *World Report* for U.S., Taiwanese and Chinese news were compared using two by two chi-square analyses in hypotheses 1, 3, 6, 7, and using one-way ANOVA in hypotheses 2, 4, 5, and 8.

Qualitative Newsroom Observation

The newsroom was visited on each of the sampled days during the two constructed weeks in which the data were collected. The first author was allowed unlimited access to all news personnel and resources, such as wire materials and newscast scripts. In order not to jeopardize the study's goal, the researcher's purpose in visiting the newsroom was never explained to the newsroom workers. The newscasts used as data for this study were recorded on the same days the visits took place. Journalists at *World Report* were not informed of when these visits would take place, nor that their news programs were being recorded for study.

The ABC network evening news on KABC-TV (Channel 7), the leading station in the Los Angeles area (L.A. Times, 1995), was also recorded on the sampled days for qualitative comparison with *World Report's* U.S. news. Both *World Report's* U.S. news section and KABC obtained their information from the same U.S. network source, but it was assumed here that they might present the information differently as a result of program selection and production variations.

Qualitative research methods involved direct observation of news operations, informal conversations with people in the news department at KSCI-TV, as well as individual extended interviews with the some people (Berkowitz, 1990; Epstein, 1973).

Results

Qualitative Results: Newsroom Observations

There were seven journalists working in the *World Report* newsroom. Most had lived in the U.S. for about 10 years. These journalists did not hold conferences to decide how and what to edit when they received footage and written materials from the ABC network and news packages of Taiwanese and Chinese evening news. News from Taiwan and mainland China was typically received before noon each day, while footage from the ABC network would continuously feed until 5:00 p.m. As soon as news materials were available to them, *World Report's* journalists worked individually on separate sections of the news broadcasts using their personal experience and judgment. They seldom appeared to consult with the news director.

There were two editors in charge of U.S. news: one took care of international news, the other national news. On average eight international stories were fed each day during the study period. Six of eight were typically picked up by *World Report* for broadcast. Therefore, there was not much to do with international news story selection except editing and language translation from English into Chinese.

Compared to international news, there was substantial selection activity with national news. Over 30 stories were received each day; typically seven of them were chosen for broadcast in *World Report*. The

news director attended to U.S. national news and left the responsibilities for other sections to his newsroom assistants.

Taiwanese and Chinese news reports were edited before they were received by *World Report*, and did not need any translation work. Approximately nine out of 13 Taiwanese news stories were selected each day. Those failing to get on the air could be local Taiwanese stories or extended speeches made by the president. Typically only two out of 16 Chinese news stories were chosen each day because the editor thought that they were “too boring” to be viewed by the Chinese audience in southern California.

About once a week stories of concern to the Chinese community in the Los Angeles area were produced and reported by *World Report*. During our observation period, for example, there was a special report of the Chinese new year festival held at Monterey Park, and interviews with the families of nine Chinese tourists killed by in a plane crash at the Grand Canyon.

The *World Report* broadcasts were not rated so their audience was largely unknown to the newscast’s journalists. Since they had no competition to pressure them into doing things a certain way, the effects of acculturation on the individual journalists might be even more important for the outcome of news presentation at *World Report* than one might expect.

In conversations with these journalists, it seemed that they preferred the way U.S. news was made. The journalists frequently mentioned that values which were apparent in the production of U.S. news were preferable. For example, one journalist felt that U.S. news contained less propaganda, and that there was more variety in the types of news stories presented. Another journalist liked human interest stories in U.S. news because she thought they were “versatile, vivid and soft.” A third journalist liked the American techniques used in editing and shooting news stories. The preference for U.S. news production styles and techniques by these journalists may be the result of acculturation processes, and could influence the way they produced their news stories.

Another influence of the host U.S. culture on the *World Report* journalists might be seen in the use of the “happy-talk” format in the newscast. *World Report* was the only Chinese-language TV news program in Southern California to use this format. The *World Report* staff were proud of the fact that they had successfully integrated this format into their broadcast, whereas they noted that news networks in Taiwan had failed in their attempts to adopt this news format. The journalists at *World Report* also thought that the milder approach they took in using this format was more appropriate than the gregarious way in which U.S. TV news was broadcast, and was more interesting than the lack of it in Taiwanese news. Thus *World Report* journalists had utilized the “happy-talk” format to enliven their news broadcast to a degree that was unlike that of their host or original culture, but was midway between.

Story topic agreement between ABC network evening news and the U.S. news section of *World Report* was analyzed. Exhibit 3 shows that *World Report* broadcast approximately 34% of U.S. news that is transmitted on ABC’s network evening news. A higher level of agreement was expected, given that ABC

was a prime source of *World Report's* national and international news. However, it was observed that the ABC network did not release its enterprise news reports to *World Report*, so *World Report's* U.S. news broadcast tended to have less enterprise news.

Exhibit 3

Table Showing Story Agreement between ABC Network News & *World Report*

| Sampled Day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
|--------------|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------|
| Agreement(%) | 46 | 50 | * | 32 | 25 | 26 | 45 | 17 | 36 | 26 | 34 |

* A special report on *World Report*

Quantitative Results

A total of 242 news stories were analyzed (U.S.=133, Taiwan=89, mainland China=20). The average story duration was 71 seconds, with 41% of all complete stories lasting between 31 to 60 seconds. The largest percentage of stories was devoted to political issues (27%), followed by institutional news (20%) and human interest stories (18%). Approximately 32% of all stories were identified as being sensational.

From the 242 news stories, 545 information units were analyzed (U.S.=222, Taiwan=277, mainland China=46). Each news story consisted of one to eight IUs for specific story; 36% of stories contained only one IU. The average duration of information units was 27 seconds. Approximately 88% of the IUs were concordant with previous IUs in the same story. In other words, just slightly different points of views were found in the news stories of *World Report*.

There were 283 sources analyzed from the samples (U.S.= 105, Taiwan= 151, mainland China=27). Each story contained one to five sources, and about 70% of all stories reported only one source. Of the sources 62% were government officials, 28% were members of groups and institutions, and 10% were private individuals. Approximately 91 % of all sources were found to be male and 9% to be female. One news source in ten, then, was female.

A comparison of U.S., Taiwanese, and Chinese news reports based on the cultural variables yielded the following results.

Source affiliation

The first hypothesis proposed that news from Taiwan would contain more government official sources than news from the U.S. The hypothesis was supported (chi-square=11.74, df=2, n=372, p<0.05).

Exhibit 4 offers a display of source type by country. Testing was done country by country. There was a significant difference between Taiwan and the U.S. (p<0.05, chi-square=11.74, df=2, n=372). News reports from Taiwan used significantly more government official sources than news from the U.S. For Taiwanese news, 70.2% of sources were found to be government officials, whereas in U.S. news, 53.1 % were

government officials. This result supports the assumption that news stories from a country with a high power distance are more likely to report official government activity than those from a low power distance country.

Exhibit 4

Crosstabulation of Source Type & Country

| Sources | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|-------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Government | 53.1 | 70.2 | 75.0 | 62.4 |
| Institution | 33.5 | 22.5 | 18.8 | 27.5 |
| Individual | 13.4 | 7.3 | 6.3 | 10.1 |
| | N=194 | N=178 | N=32 | N=404 |

Hypothesis 2 predicted that news stories from Taiwan would be more concordant than those from the U.S. The hypothesis was not supported. A one-way ANOVA analysis showed that concordance levels in *World Report's* Taiwanese news showed no significant difference from that in *World Report's* U.S. news. In Taiwanese news, 14.9% of IUs were discordant with previous IUs in the same story, and in U.S. news 11.6% of IUs were discordant. In a 1981 study of U.S. network news, Altheide (1985) reported that approximately 43% of the IUs were discordant with previous IUs. Altheide suggested that this conflictual nature appeared to be a format feature of U.S. network news. We might conclude here that *World Report's* journalists may have retained their Taiwanese values in editing the U.S. news for story concordance.

Concordance level in *World Report's* Chinese news was significantly higher than that for both Taiwanese and U.S. news ($F=5.62$, $df_1=542$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$). All IUs of Chinese news were concordant, while the percentage of concordant IUs for Taiwanese and U.S. news were 88.4 and 85.2, respectively. Hofstede (1983) proposed that mainland China may have an uncertainty avoidance magnitude as high as that of Taiwan. The results reported here suggest that mainland China tends to have higher levels of uncertainty avoidance than Taiwan.

Sensationalism and Human Interest

Hypothesis 3 stated that U.S. news would contain more sensationalism and human interest elements than Taiwanese news. The hypothesis was supported. News from the U.S. contained more sensationalist and human interest stories than those from Taiwan ($\chi^2=23.56$, $df=1$, $n=222$, $p<0.01$). Exhibit 5 shows the distribution of sensationalist and non-sensationalist stories. Among U.S. news stories 47.4% were found to be sensational, whereas only 15.7% of Taiwanese stories were sensational.

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Exhibit 5

Crosstabulation Showing Sensationalist and Non-Sensationalist Stories by Country

| Categories | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|--------------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Sensationalist | 47.4 | 15.7 | 5.0 | 32.2 |
| Non-sensationalist | 52.6 | 84.3 | 95.0 | 67.8 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

The distribution of stories by content category for each country are shown in Exhibit 6. It shows that the proportions of stories devoted to each category were quite different among the three news sections of *World Report*. In Taiwanese news, reports about the current political scene made up the largest percentage of the news (39.3%) for that section. U.S. news contained mostly human interest and crime stories (47.3%). Thus, U.S. news appeared to place emphasis on entertainment while Taiwanese news seemed to emphasize public affairs.

Exhibit 6

Crosstabulation Showing Story Category Proportions by Country

| Categories | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Politics/Law | 18.8 | 39.3 | 30.0 | 27.3 |
| Economics | 10.5 | 14.6 | 30.0 | 13.6 |
| Military | 11.3 | 1.1 | — | 6.6 |
| Institutional | 12.0 | 29.2 | 35.0 | 20.2 |
| Crime | 19.5 | 9.0 | — | 14.0 |
| Human Interest | 27.8 | 6.7 | 5.0 | 18.2 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

World Report news from mainland China also contained significantly fewer sensationalist and human interest stories than U.S. news (chi-square= 12.83, df=1, n= 153, p<0.01). News from mainland China was devoted about equally to politics/law (30%), economic (30%) and institutional stories (35%). Human interest stories made up only 5% of stories from China.

Story Duration and IUs Per Story

Hypothesis 4 proposed that Taiwanese news stories would be longer and would contain more information than news stories from the U.S. This hypothesis was supported. Taiwanese news stories in *World Report* were longer (F ratio=113.42, df1=239, df2=2, p<0.05) and contained more IUs (F ratio=49.04, df1

=239, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$) than *World Report's* U.S. news. Exhibit 7 is a crosstabulation showing story duration by country.

Exhibit 7
Crosstabulation Showing Story Duration by Country

| Seconds | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|------------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 0-30 | 21.1 | — | — | 11.5 |
| 31-60 | 65.4 | 10.1 | 10.0 | 40.5 |
| 61-90 | 13.5 | 31.5 | 40.0 | 22.3 |
| 91-120 | — | 28.1 | 30.0 | 12.8 |
| 121-180 | — | 30.3 | 15.0 | 12.4 |
| 181+ | — | — | 5.0 | 0.4 |
| Average Duration | 46.1 | 101.5 | 104.0 | 71.3 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

Chinese news reports were also significantly longer (F ratio= 13.42, $df_1=239$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$) and contained significantly more IUs (F ratio=49.04, $df_1=239$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$) than those of the U.S. The exhibit shows that the average story duration of U.S., Taiwanese and Chinese news was 46.1, 101.5 and 104.0 seconds, respectively. To facilitate reading durations are presented in categories. Analyses, however, were executed on continuous measures.

Exhibit 8 is a crosstabulation of the number of information units per story by country. The exhibit shows that on average, U.S. news offered 1.64 IUs per story, Taiwanese news 3.10, and Chinese news 2.30 IUs per story. Chinese news was found to have significantly fewer IUs per story than that of Taiwanese news (F ratio=49.04, $df_1=239$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$). Informal conversations with *World Report* journalists suggested that Chinese news was perceived as being of a lower quality than that of Taiwanese news. Therefore, Chinese TV news might be less analytically thorough and thus contain less information than Taiwanese news reports.

Sources Per Story

Hypothesis 5 proposed that Taiwanese news stories would use more sources per report than U.S. news stories. The hypothesis was supported (F ratio=9.90, $df_1=239$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$). Exhibit 9 is a crosstabulation of number of sources per story by country. The exhibit shows that, on average, Taiwanese news used two sources in each story while U.S. news used 1.46 sources per story.

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Exhibit 8

Crosstabulation Showing Number of Information Units (IUs) per Story by Country*

| IUs per Story* | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 1 | 53.4 | 11.2 | 35.0 | 36.4 |
| 2 | 33.1 | 20.2 | 35.0 | 28.5 |
| 3 | 9.8 | 23.7 | 10.0 | 18.6 |
| 4 | 3.8 | 21.3 | 10.0 | 10.7 |
| 5 | — | 9.0 | 5.0 | 2.1 |
| 6 | — | 4.5 | 5.0 | 2.1 |
| Average | 1.64 | 3.10 | 2.30 | 2.23 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

* An "information unit" (IU) is synonymous with the "information segments" concept within a story. The definition for an IU was "a statement linking an actor with an action to an object" (Altheide, 1985).

Exhibit 9

Crosstabulation Showing Number of Sources Used per Story by Country

| Sources per Story | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|-------------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 1 | 67.7 | 39.3 | 60.0 | 56.6 |
| 2 | 22.6 | 33.7 | 25.0 | 26.9 |
| 3 | 6.8 | 15.7 | 10.0 | 10.3 |
| 4 | 2.3 | 10.1 | 5.0 | 5.4 |
| 5 | 0.8 | 1.1 | — | 0.8 |
| Average | 1.46 | 2.00 | 1.60 | 1.67 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

Source Gender

Hypothesis 6 predicted that Taiwanese news would report more female sources than that of U.S. news. The hypothesis was not supported. Taiwanese news in *World Report* contained significantly fewer female sources than did U.S. news (chi-square=12.64, df=1, n=256, p<0.01). In U.S. news, 82.9% of sources were male, whereas 96.0% of sources were male in Taiwanese news. For news from China 92.6% of sources were male.

Despite low masculinity with respect to the differentiation of sex roles, Taiwanese society more readily accepts power distance differentiation than the U.S. (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1991). This may result in more males having higher power than females in Taiwanese society, because males traditionally hold more power

than females in Taiwanese culture. Source gender, then, might not be as significantly influenced by how a society delegates its sex roles as it is by those who hold power in society.

Source Channels

Hypothesis 7 stated that Taiwanese news would use more sources from routine channels than would U.S. news. This hypothesis was supported ($\chi^2=8.07$, $df=2$, $n=222$, $p<0.05$). Exhibit 10 reports the distribution of source channels (routine, informal, enterprise) by country. The exhibit shows that 58.4% of Taiwan news and 46.6% of U.S. news appeared to have been developed through routine news channels.

Exhibit 10
Crosstabulation Showing Source Channel by Country

| Source Channel | US(%) | Taiwan(%) | China(%) | Average(%) |
|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Routine | 46.6 | 58.4 | 55.0 | 51.7 |
| Informal | 45.1 | 27.0 | 25.0 | 36.8 |
| Enterprise | 8.3 | 14.6 | 20.0 | 11.6 |
| | N=133 | N=89 | N=20 | N=242 |

Note in Exhibit 10 that Taiwanese news contained 14.6% of sources from enterprise channels, which was more than that of U.S. news (8.3%). From our newsroom observations, it appeared that material from the ABC network feed contained less enterprise news than that broadcast on ABC's network evening news. We assume that the network reserved enterprise material for its own newscast use first. It follows, then, that U.S. news on *World Report* would contain less enterprise news than Taiwanese news.

Information Unit (IU) Segment Duration

Hypothesis 8 proposed that the duration of information segments within a story in Taiwanese news would be greater than that of U.S. news. The hypothesis was supported. The average duration of information segments in Taiwanese news stories was longer than that of the U.S. news stories (F ratio=25.95, $df_1=542$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$). Mainland Chinese news contained significantly longer IUs than both Taiwanese and U.S. news (F ratio=25.95, $df_1=542$, $df_2=2$, $p<0.05$). The average duration of IUs was 23.05 seconds in U.S. news, 28.82 seconds in Taiwanese news, and 40.41 seconds in Chinese news.

According to Hall (1976), both Taiwanese and mainland Chinese cultures are polychronic. But when considered from an acculturation perspective, perhaps Taiwan might tend to be more monochronic than mainland China. To the extent that Taiwan is seen as more westernized than mainland China, a shift to a more monochronic perspective might appear plausible. The difference in IU duration between Taiwan and mainland China appears to support this idea. That is, the culture of mainland China may be more polychronic

than that of Taiwanese culture. Thus, Taiwan tends to have a faster paced lifestyle, which may influence news personnel to present shorter IUs with faster tempo than is the case in Chinese news.

Conclusion

Several hypotheses were formulated in this study to test the influence of culture on the news source and format patterns of the Chinese-language news broadcast on *World Report*, a one-hour Chinese-language daily TV newscast available in the Los Angeles area. The hypotheses were based on cultural variables that may be affected during the acculturation process of journalists, and were expected to identify difference and change between cultures as a force in shaping the news content of ethnic media in the U.S. Most of the hypothesized differences were observed when news broadcasts from ethnic U.S. sources were compared to those from Taiwan. Personal observation in the newsroom also supported these results.

According to previous studies, the U.S. is a low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, individualist, masculine, low-context, and monochronic culture. In contrast, Taiwanese culture tends to have higher power distance, higher uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, femininity, high-contextualism, and a polychronic orientation. Hypotheses proposed that the U.S. news in *World Report* would contain fewer government official sources, more sensationalist and human interest stories, shorter stories with fewer and shorter information units that are shorter and conflictual, stories with fewer sources, fewer female sources, and fewer sources from routine channels than *World Report* news from Taiwan. All hypotheses were supported except that U.S. news tended to have more female sources than Taiwanese news (H6), and the levels of conflictual information within a story had no difference between U.S. and Taiwanese news (H2).

Predictions for source gender and IU concordance, which were based on differences in degree of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance between the U.S. and Taiwanese cultures, were not supported. Even though U.S. culture has been found to have a more masculine characteristic, U.S. news was more female dominated than was Taiwanese news. IU concordance in U.S. news was similar to that of Taiwanese news even though U.S. culture had been found to be less uncertainty avoiding. Some influences of acculturation may not be apparent in the works of these ethnic journalists, at least during the time period in which the data for this study were gathered. Source gender may also be influenced by cultural variables other than the way in which a culture defines its gender roles. For example, power distance may also affect gender of news sources, particularly when those in power tend to be men. The similarity in IU concordance between U.S. and Taiwanese news may also be a manifestation of remnants of Taiwanese culture influencing the way *World Report* journalists process and present information in their news broadcast.

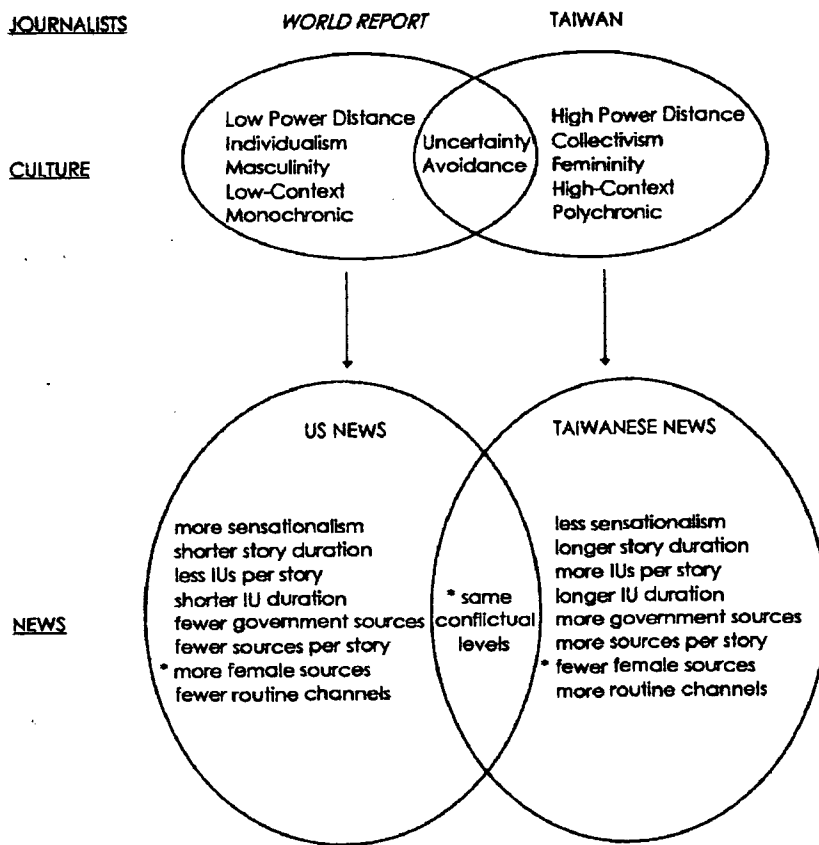
Through personal conversations with *World Report* journalists, it was discovered that they preferred the way U.S. news was made and presented than the way Taiwanese news was made. In the producing of U.S. news for an ethnic audience, *World Report* journalists followed values that were different from those used by Taiwanese journalists, and these appeared to be motivated by American culture to a greater degree than by

Taiwanese culture. These journalists appeared to have adopted American cultural values to a degree such that the acculturation processes seemed to have affected their work.

Exhibit 11 diagrams the summary findings of this study. The exhibit shows where the relationship between culture variables and *World Report's* Taiwanese and U.S. news formats and sources were tested. For example, Taiwanese culture has higher power distance and its news was found to contain more government sources. The level of conflictual information in *World Report*, Taiwanese and U.S. news, however, is the same, suggesting that levels of uncertainty avoidance by Taiwanese and *World Report* journalists is the same.

Exhibit 11

Summary of Study Results Comparing *World Report*, U.S. and Taiwanese TV News



Chinese news in *World Report* was also compared to Taiwanese news using the same hypotheses. Because the population of mainland China and Taiwan are both Chinese in ethnicity, mainland China may share cultural similarities with Taiwan, and thus mainland China may be predicted to have news broadcasts similar to those of Taiwan with respect to the cultural variables discussed in this study. The results of this study show that most of the predicted differences between Taiwanese and U.S. news do not exist between Taiwan and mainland China. Three exceptions were identified here between Taiwanese news and Chinese news, and these may provide clues about the culture dimensions of mainland China.

Chinese news stories contained less conflictual information, fewer IUs and longer IU durations than did Taiwanese news stories. Chinese culture may have higher levels of uncertainty avoidance than Taiwanese culture, which led to the higher concordance identified in Chinese news stories. Also, it is likely that the more polychronic culture of mainland China may result in longer IU duration in Chinese news than that of Taiwanese news. The results of this study show that Chinese and Taiwanese news had similar story durations. Since the IU duration in Chinese news was longer than that in Taiwanese news stories, Chinese news tended to contain fewer IUs per story. Alternatively, communism may be another factor causing the differences between Taiwanese and Chinese news. As a communist nation, China likely uses news media for purposes other than dissemination of factual information. Chinese news reports are often filled with propaganda, and conflictual information in news reports would not serve this purpose. Therefore, it is possible that the form of government in mainland China has great influence on information concordance in news reports.

Furthermore, Chinese news broadcasts are government owned and have no competitors. This may affect the quality of Chinese news reports. Chinese news may not contain an abundance of information and thus IUs per story may be lower compared to that of Taiwanese news reports. Since Chinese and Taiwanese news stories have similar durations, the IU duration in Chinese news reports tends to be longer.

Although mainland Chinese news has been used in this study for comparison with Taiwanese news with regard to cultural variables, Hofstede did not evaluate the nature of mainland Chinese culture based on those cultural variables. This might usefully be done in the future to confirm the findings of this study with respect to the degree of similarity between Chinese and Taiwanese culture.

Cultural dimensions such as those proposed by Hofstede and Hall have been shown in this study to be useful theoretical perspectives for measuring acculturation effects on news content. Future studies may also focus on using these cultural variables to study the influence of culture on news content and format in news broadcasts associated with other ethnic groups. Future analysis may also look to multivariate assessment. The analyses of the present study are all bivariate. Further, U.S. network evening newscasts might usefully be integrated into this study area in order to better assess the “distance” speculated on here between *World Report's* U.S. news and U.S. TV news proper.

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News Diffusion and Emotional Response to the September 11 Attacks

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News Diffusion and Emotional Response to the September 11 Attacks

The terrorist acts of September 11 riveted the attention of the nation as hijacked commercial airliners hit first one tower and then the second tower of the World Trade Center complex in New York. Given the magnitude of the attacks and the location in one of the country's largest media centers, live television and radio coverage was almost immediate. CBS aired a live shot of the second plane crashing into the tower. All the networks ran live coverage of the towers disintegrating and collapsing. News of the attacks monopolized all channels of communication throughout the day. Several cable channels preempted their programming in favor of CNN coverage or suspended broadcasting entirely; radio stations switched to live television feeds and Web sites stripped out graphics to facilitate the flow of information (Barringer & Fabrikant, 2001). Newspapers around the country printed extra copies and special editions and sold out early in the day on September 12 (Roman, 2001). In addition, the major networks provided continuous coverage and news updates for several days after the crash.

A catastrophe of this magnitude provides an opportunity to understand how people learn about these kinds of events, how rapidly or slowly information spreads and how people respond to the news. This study examines the news diffusion process of the September 11 attacks, as well as individuals' emotional and issue involvement with these events in relationship to media use in the first few days following the attacks.

Studies in the news diffusion tradition suggest events that are highly relevant (salient) are diffused throughout the population much more rapidly than events perceived

as being of less personal magnitude (DeFleur, 1987; Rogers, 2000). For example, 92% of the U.S. population knew of the assassination of President Kennedy within one hour (Hill & Bonjean, 1964); 50% were aware of the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger within 30 minutes (Mayer, Gudykunst, Perrill & Merrill, 1990). By contrast, only 30% were aware of an Ohio prison riot 24 hours after it occurred (Funkhouser & McCombs, 1971).

When there is variance in the assessment of the newsworthiness of an event, there is also variance in the rate of diffusion (Greenberg, Brinton & Farr, 1965). If a story is personally relevant, people are more likely to pass it on to others. For example, Magic Johnson fans were more likely to tell others about his announcement of his HIV status than non-fans (Basil & Brown, 1994).

Other studies on the diffusion of news (Rosengren, 1973) indicate that people seek information from others when the event is sudden and of crisis proportion. The positive relationship between the relevance of an event, or situation, and the motivated search for information also has been documented in the political involvement literature (Chaffee & McLeod, 1973; Chew, 1994; Kanihan & Chaffee, 1996; McCombs, 1972; Perloff, 1985).

Further, there is a correlation between the length of time between the event and how one hears of the event (Greenberg, 1964; Mayer et al., 1990). Early knowledge often comes from the media but that information is quickly passed on via word of mouth.

Finally, time of day and location influence how one learns of news events. People who learn about important events at home are far more likely to have learned via a mass

media channel than people who are at work or school where more opportunity for interpersonal diffusion is available (Jeffres & Quarles, 1983).

Salient events also drive a search for more information (Rogers, 2000). This is certainly true of the September 11 events. While Web sites may not have been the initial source of the information, they were swamped when people began searching for additional information (Greenberg, 2001; Pew, 2001a). A nationwide survey conducted September 14 through September 16 indicated Americans watched an average of 8.1 hours of television on September 11 with 18% watching more than 13 hours of television that day (Schuster et al., 2001). Abundant anecdotes recount stories of people gathering around televisions at home, in dorms or the workplace and obsessively switching channels on the chance that one network had more current information than another in an effort to reduce the uncertainty: Is it over? Who? How many? How could this happen? Who is responsible? People often turn to the media after hearing the news initially for confirmation and details (Greenberg, 1964).

For the majority of people, television was the most important source for information immediately following the attacks (Greenberg, 2001; Pew, 2001a). Nielsen Media Research estimates 60.5 million people watched one of the four networks during prime-time on September 11 (Roman, 2001). This does not include those who were following the story on CNN, CNBC or other news-oriented cable channels. A November survey by the Pew Research Center indicated that 53% of the respondents identified cable stations as their primary source for news about terrorism versus 17% for network television (Pew, 2001b).

While television has been credited as being a unifying, calming force during the time of national tragedy (Kubey & Peluso, 1990), others have blamed the media, and television in particular, for being sensationalistic, exploiting emotional issues and fueling fear and anxiety (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). Television may be a coping mechanism for some but for others it intensifies emotional upset (Nimmo & Combs, 1985). Many in the popular press endorsed the view that September 11 media coverage contributed to anxiety and fear among the general public:

...experts believe continuous television coverage of the jetliners flying into the twin towers had a widespread emotional impact (O'Hara, 2001).

The medium is supposed to unite us and soothe us during times of great national tragedy. But viewers could only feel fractured and scared as the anchors and reporters scrambled to keep up with the vivid images. Nothing in our TV history prepared us for the unfolding cataclysm of September 11, 2001 (Collins, 2001).

...talk on television and the Internet has focused more and more on fears of another terrorist attack at home – fears that have been magnified by the electronic media's dynamic of feedback and iteration (Kakutani, 2001).

Some experts say investors' anxieties have been raised by the constant media coverage of the assault on the United States. It has created a sort of wartime mindset and a sense of crisis on Wall Street, they say. 'The recent media coverage of terrorism has led to a level of fear that exceeds probable risk,' says Richard Leader, managing director of Burnham Securities in Houston (Belec, 2001).

Television does provide heightened emotional response. Moving images are more emotionally stimulating than still images (Bennet, 1998). Further, as studies of graphic violence demonstrate, context is important to interpretation (Potter, 2000). Adults understand "live action" news as "real" and the more real it seems, the higher its potential for emotional response. In a study of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake,

Newhagen and others found that increased exposure to television news corresponded to heightened levels of fear for those in the affected area (Newhagen & Lewenstein, 1992). Newhagen suggests that television coverage may actually stimulate higher levels of anxiety and fear than is actually warranted by televised events (Newhagen, 1998).

With respect to the events of September 11, a nationwide study of 560 adults conducted the weekend following the attacks found a link between the number of hours of television viewed and symptoms of stress, i.e, a correlation between increased viewing and increased stress (Schuster et al., 2001). As these authors point out, it is unclear whether television serves as a mechanism for coping with stress or whether it exacerbates stress. However, they conclude that “the psychological effects of the recent terrorism are unlikely to disappear soon ... Ongoing media coverage may serve as a traumatic reminder, resulting in persistent symptoms” (Schuster et al., 2001, p.1511).¹

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the news diffusion process during the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, particularly the relationship between the time at which people learned of the attacks and the source of information they used. In addition, we examine the relationship between the amount of time people spent following this story in the media, their emotional responses and their level of personal involvement regarding the terrorist attacks.

¹ A follow-up study by Rosenheck indicated no significant increase in those being seen for stress at institutions tracked by the Department of Veteran's Affairs in the 19 days following the September 11 attacks (Rosenheck, 2002).

Method

A survey was administered to 180 college students in the Midwest during the days following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The respondents volunteered to participate in the study; 75 percent were given the questionnaire two days after the attacks, while the other 25% were surveyed by the third day after the attacks. Our purpose was to gather information about respondents' reactions and media use during and immediately following the attacks while those reactions were still fresh in their minds.

The respondents, of whom 77% were female, ranged in age from 18 to 32 ($M = 21.52$). While the sample of respondents is not representative of all college students, we feel that the findings do indicate how news about the attacks traveled in general. As will be discussed, our descriptive findings about the news diffusion and communication process following the attacks are similar to a survey of adults in the Midwest drawn from the general population (Greenberg, 2001).

Our survey asked respondents to indicate when they first learned of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and how they first learned – by specific media or interpersonal channels. We also asked how much time the respondents had spent following the story in the media and how much they had talked to others about the attacks. To measure the extent to which respondents felt the terrorist attacks were personally relevant, or involving, to them, a five-item index drawn from the Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky, 1985) was used. Items were scaled from 1 to 7, so that a higher number indicated a higher

level of involvement. The scales were anchored by: important / unimportant; means a lot to me / means nothing to me; significant / insignificant; of no concern / of concern to me; irrelevant / relevant. Cronbach's alpha was .79 for this index.

To measure how our subjects felt about the terrorist attacks, we used a list of adjectives (Abelson, Kinder, Peters & Fiske, 1982) that were indexed into a single measure of feeling emotionally unsettled. These adjectives (worried, cheerful, nervous, safe and calm) were placed along seven-point Likert scales anchored by not at all / very much so. Cronbach's alpha for this index was .71. After item analysis, we removed the adjective "angry" from the index. This adjective lowered the reliability of the index, which made sense in the context of the September 11 attacks. The first five terms above, included in the index, connote a feeling of being emotionally unsettled, off-balance or anxious, which are standard reactions to stressful events. The adjective "anger," on the other hand, relates more to feeling indignant, hostile or "hot under the collar." Thus, in our analysis, we made a distinction between feeling emotionally unsettled and feeling angry regarding the terrorist attacks.

Results

News Diffusion

Approximately one-third (33%) of our respondents learned of the terrorist attacks within one hour of the first airplane hitting the World Trade Center on September 11. Most (82%) had learned within two hours of the attacks; 97% had learned by 10:45 a.m.

Central time (11:45 a.m. EDT), or within three hours of the first World Trade Center collision.

Half of our respondents first learned of the attacks from the broadcast media (28% from television and 16% from radio). Interestingly, we found that 6% of our respondents found out from a mix of broadcast and interpersonal channels: These respondents indicated that someone (often a parent) telephoned them and simply told them to “turn on the TV.” The magnitude of the events was so large, incomprehensible, and, at first, unclear, that some people alerted others interpersonally but quickly instructed them to see the images on television to explain the catastrophe.

Almost half (48%) of our respondents learned about the tragedies from another person; this interpersonal communication result is similar to many other diffusion studies of highly salient events. Only a few respondents (2%) learned of the attacks from the Internet, even though all students have Web access; Greenberg (2001) found a similarly low Internet usage rate in the wake of the September 11 tragedies.

Results shown in Table 1 indicate significant differences between how our respondents learned of the attacks and when they learned ($\chi^2=17.8$; $p<.05$). Respondents who learned within the first hour of the attacks found out primarily by television and radio (62%), while the others learned from another person during the first hour. During the second and third hours after the attacks, most respondents learned the news from another person (52%), while fewer heard the news on radio. Television, however, remained a steady source of information throughout the morning, with more than one-

third of our respondents first hearing about the tragedies on television during each of the first three hours.

Media Use and Emotional Reaction

Most respondents (57%) reported heavily following the tragedy in the media during the first few days – they estimated viewing the story between 11 to more than 20 hours. The other 43% of our respondents indicated following the story between 1 to 10 hours. We examined whether increased media use immediately following the attacks would effect respondents' emotional state. In contrast to what some have said about media coverage of the tragedies (Schuster et al., 2001), results shown in Table 2 indicate that the amount of time spent viewing the terrorist attack story did not affect respondents' feelings of being emotionally unsettled or off-balance. Respondents who reported heavier media use had a mean of 5.45 on the seven-point emotional response index, with 7 indicating a higher degree of emotional upset. Similarly, respondents in the lower media use group had a mean of 5.39 on this same index, indicating no significant difference in emotional upset because of media use ($p = .320$). A check of the correlation between the number of hours spent following the tragedy in the media and the degree of emotional upset (as indicated by the index) also found no relationship between these two variables ($r = .08$; $p = .30$).

We did, however, find significant differences between frequency of media use and respondents' feelings of anger ($p=.029$). Respondents who reported heavier media use (11 to 20+ hours) felt more angry about the terrorist attacks ($M=6.12$) compared to

those who followed the story for 10 hours or less ($M=5.70$). Similarly, we found a positive correlation between the number of hours spent following the tragedy in the media and increased feelings of anger ($r=.18, p=.02$). The most important source of media information for people during the first few days following the attacks was television, as indicated by our respondents and others (Greenberg, 2001; Pew, 2001b). Yet for our respondents, increases in viewing this coverage did not result in them feeling more emotionally “rattled” or off-balance; rather it made them feel more angry.

When examining emotional responses to the terrorist attacks, it is interesting to note that the women in our sample reported feeling significantly more emotionally unsettled ($M=5.60$) in the days following the attacks than did the men ($M=4.79, p=.000$), as shown in Table 3. Women and men, however, showed no differences in feelings of anger about the attacks ($p=.174$). In addition, we found no relationship between gender and number of hours spent viewing media coverage of the attacks ($r=.05; p=.54$). We did, however, find a relationship between the time at which respondents completed their survey and the degree of feeling emotionally unsettled. Respondents were surveyed between 48 and 72 hours after the attacks; those who were surveyed closer to the time of the attacks felt more emotionally unsettled ($r=.19; p=.01$). However, we found no relationship between the time at which our respondents completed their surveys and their feelings of anger regarding the attacks ($r=.05; p=.49$). We also found no relationship between survey completion time and the amount of time spent following the tragedy in the media ($r=.06; p=.46$).

Thus, the feeling of being emotionally unsettled was related to being female and to being closer in time to the attacks – rather than to media use. The response of anger, on the other hand, corresponded to increased media use but not to gender or time proximity to the attacks.

Personal Involvement

We also found that involvement, or the extent to which our respondents found the tragedy personally relevant, was related to increased communication – both interpersonal and mediated – about the event. Respondents who reported being more involved followed more media coverage of the terrorist attacks ($r=.26$; $p=.000$). We measured involvement with an index that used a 1 to 7 scale, and on average, all of our respondents reported high levels of involvement regarding the attacks ($M=6.74$, $S.D.=.4$). However, those who spent more time following the story in the media (11 hours or more) had significantly higher levels of involvement ($p=.001$), as shown in Table 2.

Correspondingly, those who were more involved also talked more to others about the terrorist attacks ($r=.22$; $p=.003$), a finding that follows other news diffusion studies indicating a connection between involvement and discussion (Kubey & Peluso, 1990; Rosengren, 1973). While we found no significant relationship between involvement and gender ($r=.10$; $p=.17$), we did find that women talked to others significantly more about the attacks than did men ($p=.006$), as shown in Table 3.

Discussion

Within three hours, 97% of our sample was aware of the September 11 attacks. These diffusion rates are similar to previous diffusion studies using college-student samples (Kubey and Peluso, 1990). We also found significant differences between when people found out about the attacks and how they found out. Those who heard of the event relatively early in the diffusion process were more apt to have heard from a media channel; those who learned of the events later were more apt to have learned from an interpersonal source.

Broadcast media, particularly television, played a critical role in diffusing early awareness of the September 11 attacks in the Midwest. Although nearly half of those surveyed learned of the attacks via interpersonal channels, radio and television were the source of information for 62% of the respondents who learned of the attacks in the first hour. As suggested, daily routines influence media patterns. For example, drive-time radio was an important initial source of the news in this study. But, after drive time, diffusion by radio in this study was minimal. By contrast, in the study of the Kennedy assassination, an event that was announced later in the day (10:30 a.m. PST), Greenberg (1964) found radio an important source during the first 15 minutes but also documented a surge in radio diffusion again later as workers tuned in over the lunch hour. Unlike studies of the Kennedy assassination, radio did not remain a key source for news throughout the diffusion period. Television was the more prevalent broadcast medium.

This can be attributed to the ubiquity of television today and to patterned media habits. In the Midwest, these events came at a time when people generally were awake

but not fully absorbed in work or school activities. Daily routines shape exposure and source of news. In this case, morning news programming and drive-time radio were key sources of early information, but as the morning progressed, radio was a less important source. Further, as noted earlier, the World Trade Center events occurred in the heart of one of the nation's largest media centers. For better or worse, unlike tragic events occurring in distant countries, compelling visual images and live coverage were available almost immediately. As reported, several of our respondents were initially simply told to "turn on the TV."

It is also interesting that despite widespread access to the Internet and an increasing number of people who claim to use the Internet for news and information, it was not a key source of initial awareness on September 11.

As an event of this magnitude would suggest, it very quickly became an inter-media diffusion process. Broadcast media, particularly television, remained an important source of diffusion during the second and third hours following the attacks, but by the second hour word traveled predominantly by word-of-mouth. As common sense and the involvement scores from this study suggest, this was a highly salient event. People were compelled to tell others the news and to seek more information. However, increased media consumption did not result in higher stress levels as reported by Schuster et al. (2001).

Our results also found that media coverage in the first days following the attacks made people angry, not more emotionally upset. Those who reported heavy media consumption in the first two days following the attacks (11 or more hours) were no more

emotionally upset than those who reported relatively light media use. The media may have helped people feel more settled, and less out of control or off-balance, by providing information.

By contrast, heavy media users did have a higher sense of personal involvement and a heightened sense of anger. Within the context of the September 11 attacks, this finding is appropriate. As indicated in previous diffusion studies, the more involved one is in the story, the more apt one is to seek additional information or to engage with the media and other people. Further, anger is often the result of a “territorial violation” and the normative response is the desire for a counter-attack (Newhagen & Lewenstein, 1992). Clearly September 11 was a territorial violation. In addition, a culprit was quickly identified. As early as 4 p.m. on September 11, CNN reported that there were “good indications” Osama bin Laden was involved. Within 72 hours Colin Powell identified bin Laden as the primary suspect (CNN, 2001). The identification of a villain reduces stress and provides a focal point for anger. It lessens the anxiety of the unknown (e.g., “Could this be another domestic terrorist?”) and provides a target for inherent hostility. Respondents could have initially felt more shaken, or unsettled upon hearing the news of the attacks, but that feeling may have dissipated over the next few days as a perpetrator was identified. Media coverage did not intensify the level of emotional anxiety or upset that our respondents were experiencing.

Finally, while greater media use didn’t contribute to upset, gender was a factor in this emotional response. We didn’t set out to explore gender differences in response to the attacks; however, a clear pattern emerged. Women were more likely to report

emotional upset than men and were more likely to use talking as a coping strategy than men. Kuby and Peluso (1990) found a similar pattern in studying reactions to the Challenger explosion. Social contact, including conversation, is a prime source of stress reduction and a coping behavior for both men and women. However, studies indicate women are more likely than men to use personal discourse as a way to cope with stress and to seek emotional support (Tamres, Jenicki & Helgeson, 2002). Talk is a more “natural” therapeutic form for women (Tannen, 1996).

It seems likely that talking with others in the wake of the attacks might be a more common response among women, as reported, but the variation we found in the level of emotional upset could be a measurement issue. Women may be more comfortable with acknowledging emotional upset and, therefore, are more likely to indicate being unsettled in self-reports; men may be less comfortable doing so.

As reports of other diffusion studies from around the country begin to appear, it will be interesting to compare diffusion rates, the initial source of the information and the level of upset among respondents. Findings by Schuster et al. (2001) suggested that the further a respondent was from New York City or a high population density area, the lower their reported stress levels. While respondents in this study clearly were emotionally upset, the levels of upset were not debilitating. The campus on which this research was conducted is in a major urban area in the Midwest but not located close to locations identified as potential terrorist targets (skyscrapers, sporting arenas, or the world’s largest shopping mall). Emotional upset could well have been higher on the East coast and somewhat lower on the West coast.

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Table 1
Relationship between News Source and Time of Learning about the Attacks

| News Source | Time of Learning about the Attacks | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | 7:46-8:45 a.m. | 8:46-9:45 a.m. | 9:46-10:45 a.m. | 10:46-11:30 a.m. |
| Television | 36% | 34% | 39% | 20% |
| Radio | 26 | 11 | 6 | 0 |
| Another Person | 38 | 52 | 52 | 60 |
| Internet | 0 | 3 | 3 | 20 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | (N=53) | (N=74) | (N=31) | (N=5) |

$$X^2(\text{d.f.}=9, N=163) = 17.8, p < .05$$

Note. Time is listed in Central Time.

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Table 2
Mean Responses to Terrorist Attacks by Frequency of Media Use

| | N | Mean | S.D. | t | Prob. |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Emotionally Unsettled | | | | | |
| Higher media use | 101 | 5.45 | .81 | -.47 | .320 |
| Lower media use | 75 | 5.39 | .88 | | |
| Anger | | | | | |
| Higher media use | 101 | 6.12 | 1.24 | -1.90 | .029 |
| Lower media use | 77 | 5.70 | 1.54 | | |
| Involvement | | | | | |
| Higher media use | 101 | 6.84 | .27 | -3.42 | .001 |
| Lower media use | 77 | 6.63 | .47 | | |
| Talking | | | | | |
| Higher media use | 101 | 6.26 | 1.03 | -3.35 | .001 |
| Lower media use | 76 | 5.67 | 1.24 | | |

Notes. Probability tests are one-tailed. Frequency of media use refers to number of hours since hearing about the attacks following the story in the media. Higher media use refers to more than 11 hours following the story in the media; lower media use refers to fewer than 11 hours following the story.

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Table 3
Mean Responses to Terrorist Attacks by Gender

| | N | Mean | S.D. | t | Prob. |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Emotionally Unsettled | | | | | |
| Women | 139 | 5.60 | .75 | -5.36 | .000 |
| Men | 39 | 4.79 | .84 | | |
| Talking | | | | | |
| Women | 139 | 6.13 | 1.06 | -2.60 | .006 |
| Men | 40 | 5.53 | 1.36 | | |
| Involvement | | | | | |
| Women | 139 | 6.76 | .39 | -1.35 | .090 |
| Men | 41 | 6.67 | .40 | | |
| Anger | | | | | |
| Women | 139 | 5.87 | 1.40 | -.95 | .174 |
| Men | 41 | 6.10 | 1.34 | | |

Note. Probability tests are one-tailed.

**Pacing in television newscasts:
Does target audience
make a difference?**

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Pacing in television newscasts: Does target audience make a difference?

Introduction

Channel One, the newscast for children, age thirteen to eighteen, has attracted considerable attention since it first beamed via satellite into junior and senior high school classrooms across the United States in 1990. The daily ten-minute program is produced by the Channel One Network, a subsidiary of the PRIMEMEDIA group. The network promotes itself and Channel One as “a learning community of 12,000 American middle, junior and high schools representing over 8 million students and 400,000 educators” (Channel One Network, October 15, 2001, <http://www.channelone.com/home/aboutchannelone.com>). A second newscast, Nick News, produced by the Nickelodeon Network, also targets children, specifically two to eleven year olds (Nickelodeon: The facts, February 17, 2002, <http://www.viacom.com/prodbyunit1.tin?ixBusUnit=20>). The network describes Nick News as its “flagship educational program...designed to educate young viewers about historical and current events” (Nick.com TV Shows, January 21,

2002, http://www.nick.com/all_nick/tv_shows/shows.jhtml?propertyId=239). It, too, is used in classrooms.

Reaction to these programs has focused largely on the commercials embedded in the newscasts. In the case of Channel One News, educators agree to air the commercials in exchange for free access to the program and equipment needed to present it (Johnston, 1995). Officials in New York State take such exception to the ads that they do not allow the program in public school classrooms (Gwynne, 1995). The debate over commercialization tends to distract from a more important question: Are producers thinking about their target audience—children and adolescents—when they structure their newscasts? The purpose of this study is to examine one structural element of Channel One and Nick News—pacing, the rate at which the images or shots presented to the viewer change. As a standard of comparison, the study will analyze the CBS Evening News on the same dimension. We know Channel One and Nick News are targeted at children and adolescents (Channel One, 2001; Nickelodeon: The facts, 2002). The CBS Evening News is clearly targeted at adults, particularly older adults (Pew Research Center, 2001, October 15, <http://www.people-press.org/mediarpt.htm>). The basic question is: Do they differ on pacing? The question is important because researchers have identified pacing as a significant factor in both attention and recall (Bolls, Potter, & Lang, 1996). Attention and recall are essential elements in the learning process. If Channel One and Nick News are intended to function as learning tools, it is important that their pacing be appropriate for their target audience.

Theory

Pacing is defined by how rapidly the shots or images presented to the viewer change. There is little question that viewers, in general, are attracted by faster paced programming. Researchers explain the effect as a result of an automatic orienting response triggered by fast-paced messages which causes the viewer to begin processing the message (Lang, 2000). Singer traces the connection between fast-paced, moving images and attention to an evolutionary drive, developed as a response to "movement in the environment, perhaps as a survival of adaptive evolutionary self-defense or hunting tendencies. We find the moving picture very difficult to ignore, and in the presence of a television set we cannot resist our eyes wandering in its direction" (Singer, 1980, p.46).

Bolls and colleagues (1996) examined the impact of production pacing on attention and recall of television messages. They found that increasing the pace of a message increases recognition up to a point at which the pace is so fast that a viewer, with limited capacity for processing the message, simply can't keep up with it. The authors also found that increasing the pace of a message increased both cued and free recall. They caution, however, that when the pace becomes too fast, recognition and recall may level off or actually decline, a curvilinear relationship. However, Wright, Huston, Ross, Calvert, Weeks, Raessing, and Potts (1984) report that fast-paced programming did not draw more attention than slow-paced programming. They also conclude that fast-paced shows produced less comprehension in children. That would seem to leave producers on the horns of a dilemma in choosing how to pace their program. But we may

be able to resolve the issue by examining the relationship between target audience and pacing.

Viewers and pacing

We know that children and adolescents are both exposed to and attracted by fast-paced programming. One of their first television experiences is the popular public television program, *Sesame Street*. Bickham, Wright, and Huston (2001) report that the program's producers deliberately employ fast pace to maximize the attention of the show's pre-school audience. The first studies of *Sesame Street* report that children who were encouraged to watch the program scored higher than a control group on tests of skills the program set out to teach (Ball & Bogatz, 1970). A follow-up study by Anderson, Huston, Smith, Linebarger, and Wright (in press) found a positive relationship between exposure to *Sesame Street* as part of preschool education and adolescent grades in English, math, and science (Bickham et al., p. 115).

Children's response to the cable channel MTV has been so great that Syracuse University popular culture researcher Robert Thompson observes, "No 14-year-old is going to say, 'What's MTV?' Even if it's not defining their lives, it's still on their radar screen." (Behind the scenes & snowed in, 2000, November 27, 2001, <http://www.dailybruin.ucla.edu/db/issues/00/2.03/ae.snowed.html>). MTV is fast-paced, to be sure. MacLachlan and Logan (1993) report MTV shot lengths average 1.6 seconds, compared to the *Bill Cosby* show, which has an average shot length of 4.7 seconds. Medium shot length, or medium pace, would be

roughly five seconds per shot. We say “roughly” because a firm standard has not been established. Video production textbooks provide no absolute guidelines on pace, and media professionals offer limited guidance on how long a shot should be in a newscast produced for use in an educational forum. Dancyger (1997) leaves the matter in the hands of the editor, to be decided on the basis of how much visual explanation is necessary to communicate the information. In a television news production handbook, Keller and Hawkins (2002) caution that “even though sequences of many shots per second are common on television, they give only an impression, and news stories generally want to do more than that—they attempt to give information” (Keller & Hawkins, 2002, p. 275). The authors suggest that shots should last at least a couple of seconds to allow viewers to comprehend the information they contain (Keller & Hawkins, 2002). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that production standards derive from the routines that develop as media professionals create content, and the author, in experiencing those routines over twenty years of television news producing, was advised that shots, on average, should last about five seconds.

MacLaghlan and Logan (1993) also report that the pace of television commercials has increased dramatically since 1978. In 1978, commercials averaged 7.9 cuts per 30 second spot (average shot length of 3.8 seconds). In 1991, commercials averaged 13.2 cuts per 30 second spot (average shot length 2.3 seconds). Exposure to MTV and the ample supply of commercials on television might condition teens to fast-paced programming, which should equip them to process it.

Adults, especially those over 50, are not found in the MTV audience. They are not generally attracted to fast-paced programming; in fact, quite the reverse seems to be true. It is common to hear older viewers complain about the fast pace of a program. By avoiding such programming, they also avoid being conditioned to process it. They should favor medium or slower paced programming, instead.

Assuming that children and adolescents have a preference for and consume fast-paced programming, while adults prefer and consume predominantly medium or slower paced programming, we would expect to find a difference in content pacing between a newscast targeted at children and adolescents (Nick News and Channel One) and a newscast targeted at adults (CBS Evening News).

H₁: If a television newscast is targeted at a child audience (age 8 to 18), the producers will utilize faster pacing in presenting a message than in a newscast targeted at adults.

Method

Independent variable

In this study the independent variable is the target audience. Channel One and Nick News represent a newscast targeted at a child-adolescent audience (Channel One Network, 2001; Nickelodeon: The facts, 2002). The CBS Evening News represents a newscast targeted at adults (Pew Research Center, 2001). We assume the structure of these newscasts will reflect the difference between those audiences with regard to pacing.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is pacing. The unit of analysis is the newscast. The unit of observation is individual news stories contained in those newscasts. Fifty CBS, 50 Channel One, and 50 Nick News stories were analyzed for pacing. The sample was constructed by choosing a random starting date and selecting as many consecutive shows of each type (Channel One News, Nick News, and CBS Evening News) as necessary to achieve a total of 50 stories from each type of newscast. A common start date was chosen to control for the effect of history on treatment of stories. Channel One archives were limited to the year 2000, so that year was chosen. The month (February) and date (February 26) were chosen at random from a table of random numbers. The process yielded 23 consecutive programs for Channel One (the programs average two stories per show), which the Channel One Network agreed to provide to the author. Six CBS Evening News programs were selected (CBS Evening News programs average 12 stories per newscast) and acquired through the Vanderbilt University television news archive. Nick News airs only once a week, and did not air on February 26. The closest air date was February 24, 2000. Eight consecutive weekly newscasts were selected and the program's producers agreed to supply the programs for study. Program pacing scores were determined only for newscasts in which all stories were coded. That resulted in four CBS Evening News programs, 23 Channel One programs, and eight Nick News programs being coded completely.

Pacing was operationalized as the number of cuts or shot changes per story. A cut occurs when the shot or image changes. A cut was counted only when the background of the frame changed. Addition of graphic effects to an original image was not considered a cut. CBS employed three treatments to present its stories: stories that begin with the anchor on camera and cut to voice-over video; stories that begin with a live reporter standup, cut to a preproduced reporter package, and end with a live reporter tag; and stories that are packaged reports introduced by the anchor. Channel One employed two treatments: stories that begin with a live reporter standup and cut to a package, and stories that are packaged reports introduced by the anchor. Nick News employed two treatments: stories introduced by the anchor, and stories that began with video immediately after a commercial break. A second coder analyzed twenty percent of the sample and produced a reliability score of 84 percent, using the Scott's pi formula.

The pacing score for each story was calculated by dividing the number of shot changes by the length of the story in seconds, to control for the length of the story. A pacing score was computed for all of the stories in the sample, and for all of the complete newscasts coded for each target audience. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted for the pacing variables by target audience. As explained earlier, ranking of pacing scores was based on the general industry practice that, on average, shots should change every five seconds. In this study, a story that adheres to that guideline is considered medium paced. The pacing score for a medium-paced story is .200. Stories with pacing scores below .200

are considered slower paced, stories with pacing scores above .200 are considered faster paced.

Results

Examination of the pacing scores for all stories in the sample identified a highly deviant value among the Channel One scores—a pacing score of .700. The next highest score was .350. Including the .700 pacing score was deemed a threat to computation of accurate estimates of the means for Channel One stories and newscasts. It was excluded from the final analysis.

The mean pacing score for child-adolescent audience stories (Nick News and Channel One News together) was .299, with a standard deviation of .156. The mean pacing score for child-adolescent audience newscasts was .252 with a standard deviation of .100. The mean pacing score for Nick News stories was .399 with a standard deviation of .157, and the mean pacing score for Nick News newscasts was .400 with a standard deviation of .070. The mean pacing score for Channel One stories was .197, with a standard deviation of .056, and the mean pacing score for Channel One newscasts was .202, with a standard deviation of .034 (see Table 1). The CBS Evening News stories had a mean pacing score of .203, with a standard deviation of .057. CBS Evening News newscasts had a mean pacing score of .201, with a standard deviation of .014 (see Table 1).

The one-way analysis of variance for story pacing by target audience was statistically significant, therefore supporting the hypothesis. The Bonferroni test shows statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences for children compared to each

of the two other groups, but no significant difference between adolescents and adults.

Discussion

We expected to find a difference in pacing between a television newscast targeted at a child-adolescent audience and a television newscast targeted at an adult audience, and with Nick News and Channel One combined into one target audience covering an age range from roughly five years to eighteen years, our expectation—that the newscast for a younger audience would utilize faster pace—was confirmed. At first glance, it would appear that producers of newscasts for younger viewers are applying the research finding that fast pace is an effective treatment of pace with that age group.

Our prediction did not prove correct, however, with regard to Channel One News. We found no statistically significant difference in pacing between the newscast targeted at adolescents and the newscast targeted at adults. There is no evidence that a program for adolescents is faster paced than a program targeted at adults. We have to ask why.

It may be that the results are unique to this sample. Perhaps another study, with a different sample, would give different results.

Perhaps the similarity in pacing is explained by a change in adult newscasts. Did adult programming catch up with the adolescent program by increasing its pacing? It would be possible to detect a change in adult newscast pacing by accessing newscasts produced some time ago and analyzing their pace. The adults' newscast producers may be utilizing medium pace rather than

slower pace in an attempt to maximize attention to the newscast. But even medium pace, given that adult viewers are not conditioned for faster paced programming, may mean maximizing attention at the risk of reducing the amount of information viewers will actually learn from the newscast (Gunter, 1987).

It may be that processing news for television is a uniform and routine process that produces the same pace regardless of audience (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). A related explanation would be that professional television news editors are consistent and habitual in the way they assemble a story, no matter what audience the program intends to attract. Or, in producing this newscast for adolescents, did Channel One imitate the standards of the well-established adult newscast to gain legitimacy for its own product?

The important question underlying this study is the relationship between pacing and attention to and recall of television news by younger and older viewers. Researchers have long criticized television news as a poor learning tool, and they focus on pace as a major part of the reason. Gunter (1987), in his analysis of the limitations of television news as a learning medium, concludes that the pace of television leaves too little time for “effective cognitive processing” (Gunter, p. 47). Stauffer, Frost, and Rybolt (1983) identify factors conducive to learning—study, repetition, connection to prior knowledge, elaboration with additional redundant information—and conclude that “the rapidly moving and non-repetitive format of television news is not conducive to this type of information processing” (Stauffer et al., p. 35). It may be that the producers of

Channel One News and the CBS Evening News are attempting to be cognizant of those findings in establishing a medium pace.

Given its connection to attention and recall, pacing merits further study. Additional study could also examine the level of attention and recall generated by news programs in three treatments, slow, medium, and fast pace, across the two audiences considered here. Such work could provide important guidelines for television news producers committed to creating newscasts from which viewers can learn.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations for pacing variables.

| Pacing Scores N | Mean Pacing Scores | Std. deviation | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|----|
| Child-adolescent stories* | .299 | .156 | 99 |
| Child-adolescent newscasts** | .252 | .100 | 31 |
| Nick News stories* | .399 | .157 | 50 |
| Nick News newscasts** | .400 | .070 | 8 |
| Channel One stories* | .197 | .056 | 49 |
| Channel One newscasts** | .202 | .034 | 23 |
| CBS Evening News stories* | .203 | .057 | 50 |
| CBS Evening News newscasts** | .201 | .014 | 4 |

* # of shot changes / length of story in seconds = story pacing score

** $\Sigma(\text{story pacing scores}) / \# \text{ of stories in the newscast} = \text{newscast pacing score}$

Table 2. One-way analysis of variance for pacing by target audience.

| Variables | Target Audience | | | F | df | significance |
|-----------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----|--------------|
| | Adults Mean (SD) | Adolescents Mean (SD) | Children Mean (SD) | | | |
| Pacing* | .203 (.057) | .197 (.056) | .399 (.157) | 63.15** | 148 | p<.001 |

* # of shot changes / length of story in seconds = story pacing score

** Bonferroni test shows statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences for children compared to each of the two other groups, but no significant difference between adolescents and adults.

THE MYTH OF THE FIVE-DAY FORECAST: A STUDY OF TELEVISION
WEATHER ACCURACY AND AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF ACCURACY IN
COLUMBUS, OHIO

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Abstract

Television weather has not been studied in a communication journal since 1982, despite technological advances and a reliance on forecasts by a transient public. This study measured accuracy of weather forecasts in central Ohio and found that stations were very accurate in predicting within 48 hours, but extended forecasts were quite inaccurate. Interviews with local television weathercasters revealed that they use the extended forecast as a marketing tool. Telephone interviews with 315 central Ohio residents revealed that they not only rely on the five-day forecasts, but believe them to be accurate. Television was cited as the dominant resource for weather information, and a majority of respondents said they choose weather forecasts for reasons other than perceived accuracy.

Reasons for this Study

Justifying a study of television weathercasting may be a trifle daunting given that it has been treated as a somewhat frivolous segment of both local and national newscasts over the years. It has been presented by a cartoon character named Woolly Lamb, delivered by a jovial national weather anchor dressed as Carmen Miranda and has even spawned one of America's most successful late-night comedians and talk show hosts. (see Henson, 1990 and Monmonier, 1999) Yet despite its frivolous nature and its presentations as a form of entertainment, weather has become serious business during the past two decades.

Moreover, the importance to its audience has remained constant throughout the history of television. Weather has not only outdrawn both local news and sports, its viewers in Los Angeles chose it "as their favorite news subject over crime, Hollywood, and 15 other topics." (Shaw, 1981) The national weather service in 1980 polled personnel at five television stations, each of which unanimously named weather "the major reason that people watch the news program." (Henson, 1990)

The same holds true of local weather today. News directors and weathercasters from all three network-affiliated stations in Columbus, OH, said weather is still the primary reason people tune in their newscasts. News Director John Cardenas of WBNS-TV (CBS) said that it is not unusual to outlay a million dollars or more as start up capital for a major market weather budget. Cardenas added he is not sure what portion of his budget is spent each year on weather (upgrades and personnel), but "I don't think the amount of money you spend on your weather department reflects the emphasis and the importance that you put in your product." (J. Cardenas, personal communication, February 9, 2002)

Another reason to study this often overlooked portion of television news is that while many weather anchors are still entertaining, they treat weather as serious business, especially when it comes to inclemency. Chief Meteorologist Jym Ganahl of WCMH-TV (NBC) said he remembers the very day weather became serious business for his station:

The day before the blizzard of 1978, Jerry Razor was doing the weather at the time, and, uh, he did not realize the enormity of the blizzard. The station seemed to, uh, changed its philosophy overnight, and started going toward more college-

educated meteorologists. (J.Ganahl, personal communication, February 10, 2002)

Channel 4 now has four weathercasters, three full time, each of whom are certified meteorologists. In the 1950s, the American Meteorological Society began to certify weather anchors, and had given about a thousand of them the seal of approval by 1959. The anchors had to complete a core of courses and submit a tape of weathercasts for three consecutive days. (Monmonier, 1999) Weathercasters also must be skilled in computers, familiar with base maps, topography and geography, in addition to being a personable narrator that can make complex information intelligible to non-technical viewers. (Monmonier, 1999) WBNS-TV Chief Meteorologist Mike Davis said "many people don't have any idea what I do all day. Sometimes I'm just a glorified computer operator." (M. Davis, personal communication, February 10, 2002)

In fact, thanks to the technology and television innovativeness that has accompanied the science of weather prediction since the 1980s, television meteorologists are capable of giving a fairly accurate and comprehensive forecast, at least to within 48 hours of the telecast. The addition of the Weather Channel and other cable services has increased the competitiveness for viewers as well.

Herein lies the problem and the catalyst for this study. Television executives have realized that as with any other program, including the news, they must market and promote weather to increase the number of viewers and thereby advertising revenue. According to Matthew Kerbel (2000), author of *If It Bleeds, It Leads*:

The problem is you can say it all in about 4 seconds. This, of course, normally would be an asset. But, because weather reports are so inherently entertaining, they're the one place where the brevity clause in the Fundamental Rule doesn't apply. In fact, weather reports draw such a large audience that they need to be drawn out as much as possible and repeated throughout the show. Enter the Weather Corollary to the Fundamental Rule: Successful weather reports should contain as much extraneous information as possible.

At the end of this two and a half to four minute presentation generally is the extended forecast, usually a five-day outlook. According to the Columbus meteorologists, there is no scientific reason for peering five days into the future, nor can they do it with any confidence of accuracy. All three weathercasters admitted freely that

they are confident of their predictions anywhere from 48 to 72 hours and anything beyond that is an educated guess, but too many factors can influence the weather over four or five days. All three also admitted with candor that the five-day forecast is a marketing tool. In fact, WSYX-TV (ABC) incorporates a six-day forecast to give the appearance of giving the viewer an extra day's weather, and it helps to promote channel six. (C. Gillespie personal communication, February 5, 2002)

From the viewers' perspective, however, the extended forecast may be far more important. WBNS Chief Meteorologist Mike Davis said about their audience research, "The number one thing they want is the five-day." (M. Davis, personal communication February 10, 2002) The question then becomes "How much does the viewer rely on this extended information and how accurate does he or she perceive it to be?" Chuck Gillespie of WSYX said that the six-day forecast is designed to "push people to the weekend," even though he knows the forecast is usually wrong. According to Gillespie, it is still an informed account, but fronts may be stalling and the jet flow will change, running the weather in front or behind the prediction. (C. Gillespie, personal communication, February 5, 2002)

All three weathercasters agreed that the majority of their phone calls and "street talk" if they are related to weather at all are either about "What do I need to wear tomorrow?" or "Is the weather going to affect my travel plans for the weekend?" Ganahl said many viewers just think of their weathercaster as a friend to talk to. He said he has received calls like, "My mouth tastes salty. What does that mean?" and one woman who said her sump pump was off and wanted to know if she should turn it on. (J. Ganahl, personal communication, February 9, 2002)

The meteorologists interviewed said they all are using similar tools and maps and will be fairly consistent and accurate. Viewers may perceive one station as more accurate than another, but the reality is that there will not be a great disparity on tomorrow's forecast among the stations. The consensus was that viewers will often choose a weather forecast based on habit (the person or station they've always watched) or because they like a particular presentation best. Sometimes it is nothing more than the lead-in -- the show that precedes the news -- that drives the decision. Gillespie's assessment of the audience was that "It comes down to who you like telling you the story." (C. Gillespie, personal communication, February 5, 2002)

Review of Literature

Perhaps the most compelling reason for this study is that there has not been a comprehensive study of television weather published in a communication journal since 1982. Before that, only a few scattered studies were completed about television and/or newspaper weather, yet each study indicated that editors and news directors appeared to underestimate the importance of weather to their respective consumers.

Bogart (1968) found that television was preferred by more than half of the probability sample, and concluded "It must be the personality of the weathercasters who make this mundane subject come to life." Tan (1976) determined that television was used more often (53 percent of the respondents) than any other medium to obtain weather information. However, even though respondents used television more often, only 41 percent (41 for radio also) considered it their *preferred* source for weather. Tan accounted for the difference by surmising that people preferred telephone and radio because it "might reasonably be interpreted to indicate preference for weather information that is readily available and on conveniently accessible media." This might apply today to the Weather

Channel, which supplies constant information and provides local forecasts "on the eights."

Hyatt et. al. (1978) tested recall of television weather reports, and concluded that the "amount of weather information retained from a forecast seems to be minimal indeed." Because this information is a quarter of a century old, however, the researchers tested recall of such information as barometric pressure and wind conditions, which are not necessarily staples of modern forecasts. The authors did pose an interesting question: "If most viewers remember little about the weather report, why is so much time devoted to weather in local newscasts?"

Gantz (1982) finally attempted a study of accuracy, as well as redundancy, in weathercasts in Indianapolis, a city not unlike Columbus, the test area for this study. The data from this research suggested that forecasts frequently vary from station to station, contradictory to what the meteorologists interviewed for this study have suggested. Gantz further noted that the forecast was not likely to change from the six p.m. to the 11 p.m. newscast. Remember that at this time Doppler and NEXRAD weather information was not readily available. Many stations, especially in large markets, now boast of a "First Alert" system that can pinpoint weather conditions up to the minute. It is logical

to assume that updating the 11 p.m. forecast might be an easier task today.

Even as early as 1982, however, Gantz realized that "long-range predictions may represent television's effort to present as much weather data as is available, to keep up with competing news media and to meet the public's needs and expectations in the area." Gantz' analysis revealed that only 41 percent of four-day predictions were accurate within five degrees, compared to 73 percent for the next day.

These studies indicate that several areas of analysis need to be revisited because weather technology, budgets and even personnel have changed so much during the past twenty years. Some new areas need to be explored as well. Based on these studies and the information provided by the interviewed weathercasters, this study will attempt to test the following hypotheses:

H1 Weather forecasts beyond two days will be significantly less accurate than weather predicted for two days or less.

H2 Weather forecasts among the three stations will not vary significantly among next-day or two-day predictions.

H3 A majority of respondents will indicate that the extended forecast is at least somewhat important to them.

H4 A majority of respondents will indicate that they believe that extended forecast is at least somewhat accurate.

H5a A majority of respondents will choose a favorite station for weather based on habit or personality rather than perceived accuracy.

H5b A majority of respondents will choose a favorite weathercaster based on habit or personality rather than perceived accuracy.

Methodology

The methodology for this research entailed three basic components. First, interviews were conducted with three central Ohio meteorologists and a news director to ascertain information about accuracy, marketing of weather, audience feedback and weathercasters' perceptions of their own audience. The information gleaned from these interviews

was particularly useful in designing the second and third components of the study.

The second component was an analysis of the extended forecasts of each of the three network-affiliated stations. Six p.m. weather forecasts were videotaped for a 30-day period beginning February 15, 2002. The six p.m. forecast was chosen because meteorologists indicated that it is most likely to be used for extended information. Five-day predictions (or in the case of channel six, six-day predictions) were recorded each day up through day 25. In the final five days, only the day's actual high temperature, amount of precipitation and cloud cover were recorded for each station to assess the previous extended forecast predictions. Each forecast prediction was coded as a "hit" or a "miss" based on high temperature, amount of precipitation and cloud cover. The accuracy was based on factors provided by the weathercasters themselves. Temperature was considered accurate if the prediction was within five degrees in either direction of the actual temperature. Precipitation amount was considered accurate if the prediction was within a half inch of the actual amount. Cloud cover was divided into four ordinal categories: sunny, partly cloudy, mix of clouds and sun, and cloudy. The prediction was considered accurate (based

on the meteorologists' own account) if it was within one category of the actual condition, e.g., a partly cloudy forecast was considered accurate if sunny was predicted, but a sunny forecast was considered inaccurate if a mix was predicted. The high temperature was also coded as degrees different from the actual (an absolute value) to more effectively assess the differences among day-one to day-five predictions.

The third component was a telephone survey conducted during a four-day period from February 18 to February 21. Three upper class students were trained to conduct the interviews, consisting of 20 questions, the final five of which were demographic information. Some were open-ended questions, such as "Why did you choose the station you most often watch for weather?" and "What factor is most important to you in tomorrow's (same question about five-day) weather?" Other questions were multiple choice with gradient scale answers, such as "How accurate do you think the five-day forecast is?" Answers ranged from "very accurate" to "not accurate at all."

Random-digit dialing was used to obtain a sample population of central Ohio. Respondents were called on weeknights between 6:30 and 9:30 so that they would not be called during a newscast. Three hundred fifteen respondents

were reached and completed the survey. There were no age limits placed on respondents to the survey, as long as they were old enough to access weather information and understood the questions. The youngest respondent was 14 and the oldest was 86. Demographic statistics revealed that there were no significant differences in average age, gender and racial makeup between the sample and actual statistics from the 2000 census for Columbus.

The first question asked was what source(s) the respondent relied upon most for weather. If television was not mentioned as one of the sources, interviewers skipped the questions regarding specific television weathercasts, but coded demographic information. This question was designed to compare use of media for weather information to the Tan study.

Results

Apparently the choice of medium has changed dramatically since 1976, at least for a large television market. One hundred ninety-three respondents (61 percent) chose television as the medium they most relied upon for weather. Surprisingly, only 44 (14 percent) listed multiple sources, and only 40 (12.7 percent) listed radio, while

just 16 (5 percent) listed the Internet, despite the immediate availability of the latter two. The accessibility of television in the workplace and eateries may have contributed to its popularity.

In response to the first hypothesis, two measures were used. The mean difference in temperature between day-one predictions and the actual temperature was 2.72 degrees (N=75, SD=2.9296). The mean difference for day-two predictions was slightly under four, indicating that temperature predictions for both days among all stations were aggregately accurate to within five degrees. The day three through five predictions varied six to ten degrees on the average, considered a miss by the local meteorologists.

Table 1
Five-day predictions by high temperature
difference and forecast accuracy

| | Mean high temp. dif. | SD | Percent accurate |
|--------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| Day 1 | 2.72 | 2.9296 | 84.0 |
| Day 2 | 3.97 | 3.8449 | 72.0 |
| Day 3 | 6.09 | 5.2817 | 40.0 |
| Day 4 | 8.47 | 7.3931 | 25.3 |
| Day 5 | 9.73 | 7.1684 | 21.3 |
| Day 6* | 10.88 | 6.6353 | 20.0 |

*WSYX only, N = 25.
All others, N = 75.

The second measure for testing hypothesis one was the actual weather conditions. For day-one predictions, the stations accurately predicted 63 of 75 forecasts, for 84 percent. Hits and misses were based on the criteria mentioned in the methodology. Day-two predictions were correct 54 times, or 72 percent. Day-three forecasts were accurate 30 of 75 times, or 40 percent of the time. Day-four predictions were accurate about 25 percent of the time and day-five forecasts 21 percent. WSYX, the only station to provide a six-day prediction, was accurate on 20 percent of those. Table 1 lists a summary of the extended predictions for both high temperatures and weather conditions.

To test hypothesis two, Pearson R correlations were calculated for the three stations on all five days. As expected, there were high correlations among all three stations for days one and two. What was unexpected was that the correlations among the stations for days three, four and five actually increased. See Table 2 for the correlations for all five days. One possible explanation is that meteorologists tend to rely on multiple sources for interpreting the conditions for the immediate forecast. They are not as diligent for the extended forecast,

however, and may all rely on the same National Weather Service map (or perhaps each other) for the five-day predictions.

Table 2
Correlations among stations' extended forecasts

| | WCMH - WSYX | WCMH - WBNS | WSYX - WBNS |
|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Day 1 | .688 | .513 | .864 |
| Day 2 | .502 | .560 | .523 |
| Day 3 | .615 | .779 | .674 |
| Day 4 | .866 | .897 | .971 |
| Day 5 | .845 | .836 | .956 |

N = 75

All correlations 2-tailed sig. $p < .01$.

Hypothesis three suggested that at least half of the respondents would consider the extended forecast somewhat important to them. This was supported as shown in Table 3. More than 80 percent of those interviewed said the five-day forecast was somewhat or very important to them. In fact, 104 respondents, almost 41 percent, said it was very important.

Hypothesis four explored whether the majority of respondents would perceive the five-day forecast to be at least somewhat accurate. Again, the evidence supports this contention. Only 12 respondents, 4.7 percent, believed the

extended forecast was very accurate. However, 123, or more than 48 percent, believed the extended forecast to be somewhat accurate. Only six, or 2.4 percent, believed it was not accurate at all. Complete results are compiled in Table 4.

Table 3
How important is the five-day forecast to you?

| Response | Number | Percent |
|----------------------|--------|---------|
| Very important | 104 | 40.8 |
| Somewhat important | 102 | 40.0 |
| Not sure | 6 | 2.3 |
| Somewhat unimportant | 34 | 13.4 |
| Very unimportant | 9 | 3.5 |

N = 255

Finally, hypothesis five supposed that respondents would choose a favorite station for weather and a favorite weathercaster based on habit or personality rather than perceived accuracy. To test H5a, respondents were asked on what basis they chose a television station for weather. More than 41 percent of the answers were categorized as force of habit or based on the lead-in (either the program preceding the news or their favorite newscast determined the decision). Thirty respondents, 19.4 percent, chose the

station based on perceived accuracy. Personalities of the weathercasters accounted for 10.4 percent of the choices.

Table 4
How accurate is the five-day forecast on the station you watch most often?

| Response | Number | Percent |
|---------------------|--------|---------|
| Very accurate | 12 | 4.7 |
| Somewhat accurate | 123 | 48.2 |
| Not sure | 38 | 14.9 |
| Not very accurate | 76 | 29.8 |
| Not accurate at all | 6 | 2.4 |

To test H5b, respondents was asked who their favorite weathercaster was and why. One hundred ninety-three respondents, more than 61 percent, had no favorite. Of the ones who chose a favorite, 43.4 percent of the answers were categorized as "personable." This was more than double the 20.8 percent of respondents who gave answers categorized as "accuracy/knowledge." Results of hypothesis five are shows in Table 5.

Conclusions

In discussing the results, it must be made clear that there are limitations to this study. While the demographics

of the sample accurately reflected the population, this study is of course limited to a central Ohio audience and accuracy results are limited to a one-month study during winter. A winter month was chosen because winter weather is typically more volatile (Monmonier, 1999), but it should be noted that this was an unusually mild winter month according to the meteorologists interviewed.

Table 5
Reason for choosing...

| ...favorite station.* | | | ...favorite weathercaster.** | | |
|-----------------------|--------|---------|------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Reason | Number | Percent | Reason | Number | Percent |
| Habit | 32 | 20.8 | Personable | 46 | 43.4 |
| Lead-in | 32 | 20.8 | Accurate | 22 | 20.8 |
| Accur. | 30 | 19.4 | No nonsense | 12 | 11.3 |
| Urgency | 22 | 14.3 | Other | 12 | 11.3 |
| Other | 22 | 14.3 | Humor | 8 | 7.5 |
| Person | 16 | 10.4 | Habit | 6 | 5.7 |

*N = 154

**N = 106

A second difficulty is that measuring weather predictions and conditions can be as precarious as predicting the weather itself. Although the measurements of accuracy were based on suggestions from readings and the meteorologists themselves, there is no standard for

measuring weather accuracy. Certain anomalies can occur, especially in winter, such as temperatures falling during the day rather than rising. This phenomenon occurred only twice during the study period, however, and did not appear to skew the results.

A third concern was that the weather may have varied within the market's area of dominant influence. The central Ohio market is geographically massive, and temperatures and weather conditions were based on downtown Columbus readings, even though conditions may have been quite different throughout the region.

Limitations notwithstanding, there are things to be learned from this research. As suggested, television pundits may implement the extended forecast as a marketing tool, but they have appeared to underestimate its importance and believability to the audience. This is vital considering that television is still the dominant medium of choice for weather information.

Viewers apparently choose their television weather forecasts based on habits, personalities and lead-in shows rather than perceived accuracy. This may not be problematic, however, because the data suggest that the source of information does not vary widely from station to station. An additional question that was asked but not used

statistically was the choice for favorite weathercaster. Interestingly, the two top choices were the weathercasters with the most tenure in the Columbus market, which again suggests viewing by habit.

There is a myriad of information that can be obtained relating to television weather. Suggestions for future research would include qualitative studies to find out more about why audiences believe what they believe and make the choices they make. Future quantitative studies could include a comparison of market to market, season to season, or both. There is reason to believe that winter weather in Fargo, North Dakota, may be far more important to its audience than spring weather in Los Angeles, California.

Those who pursue research in the area of uses and gratifications may want to resume and expound upon the work done by Tan. Continued work in the area of television weather, as well as exploration of weather use in other media, should be important to the consumers of media, producers of media and to those who study the media.

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**VISUAL BIAS IN BROADCASTERS' FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND OTHER FACTORS
AFFECTING VOTING BEHAVIOR OF TV NEWS VIEWERS IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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**VISUAL BIAS IN BROADCASTERS' FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND OTHER FACTORS
AFFECTING VOTING BEHAVIOR OF TV NEWS VIEWERS IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

ABSTRACT

This study of nonverbal bias in a political campaign shows that ordinary TV viewers can and do perceive biases in the facial expressions of television newscasters. Two of the five anchors studied exhibited significantly more positive facial expressions when they mentioned one presidential candidate than the other in coverage of the 1996 election. But, unlike a previous study, these results do not support a link between viewer perception of newscaster's facial bias and voting behavior. Using NES data in a secondary analysis, we find that which TV news show is watched was the least important of the seven variables examined.

VISUAL BIAS IN BROADCASTERS' FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING VOTING BEHAVIOR OF TV NEWS VIEWERS IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Introduction

In the 1970s, the study of nonverbal communication emerged as a legitimate area of scholarship and media researchers immediately saw the implications for television news (Burgoon, 1980). Until then, studies of television news bias usually focused on its verbal aspects. While this is still a popular area of study, for those interested in bias, research into nonverbal communication has opened up a new and fruitful area.

Most studies of nonverbal bias in political campaign coverage examine the facial expressions of the candidates. But in two clever and intriguing studies, the focus turned toward the broadcasters. Friedman and colleagues (1980a; 1980b) and Mullen and colleagues (1986) concluded that television news broadcasters *did* exhibit bias toward candidates via their facial expressions. The study by Mullen and colleagues then took visual bias studies a step further to investigate whether newscasters' biased facial expressions affected the voting behavior of viewers. The study concluded that "regular viewing of a newscaster who exhibits facial expressions that are biased in favor of a particular political candidate is associated with an increased likelihood of voting for that political candidate" (Mullen et al., 1986, p. 294).

This study replicates the methodology of Mullen et al. to examine whether bias in the facial expressions of newscasters continues in a more recent campaign. We believe that Mullen et al.'s conclusion that one network anchor exhibited a significantly positive bias in favor of Ronald Reagan in 1984 is at least plausible and perhaps even convincing.

If the Mullen findings of bias in newscasters' facial expressions hold for the 1996 presidential campaign, then this research will test the impact of the visual bias with a secondary analysis of the National Election Study data from 1996. We believe that the conclusion Mullen et al. reached with the second phase of their research is susceptible to an alternative explanation. No study since Mullen's has attempted to investigate these findings, and they continue to be published unquestioned (Gladwell, 2000).

Finding bias in the news

While some studies have found bias in news coverage, numerous content analyses of late have not borne out the charge of bias in the verbal content of campaign news coverage (Stovall, 1988; Domke et al., 1997; Robinson, 1985). The growing awareness of visual bias is pointed out in one study that found no verbal bias but acknowledged the limitation of failing to include visual elements: "Our analysis may not tap enough of the emotional impact of media coverage because we examined only the spoken and written texts . . . The visual impact of Dole on television and in newspaper photos may have left a very different impression . . ." (Domke et. al., 1997, p. 733).

Research suggests that the nonverbal component of communication is at least as influential as, if not more so than, the verbal content of the message in determining how an individual is perceived (Graber, 1990; Mehrabian, 1968; Argyle, Alkema & Gilmour, 1971). Among the findings are that visual news messages were twice as likely to be remembered as verbal messages (Graber, 1988) and that visual images have great potential for generating powerful emotional responses (Biocca, 1991). Visual cues have been shown to be dominant in affecting observers' responses during audio-visual

presentations such as television news, and visual cues are more influential and more accurate in detecting mood (Burns & Beier, 1973). Facial close-ups are rich sources of direct and inferred information (Graber, 1990) because they readily reveal mental states (Ekman, 1983). It has been shown that people can reliably detect facial affect even when it appears for only a fraction of a second (Rosenthal et. al., 1979) or is embedded in the background of a newscast (Lanzetta, Sullivan, Masters & McHugo, 1985). Furthermore, nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions can be reliably scaled on a positive/negative dimension (Mehrabian, 1972; Clore, Wiggins & Itkin, 1975).

But whether visual cues are strong enough to produce changes in behavior is another matter. According to Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion, people process messages in one of two ways: The "central route" requires cognitive effort, that is, actually thinking about a message before making decisions. Processing via this route requires people to possess both the ability and the motivation to make this cognitive effort. Processing via the "peripheral route" occurs when people are influenced by incidental cues, such as a speaker's attractiveness or perceived credibility. Not much thinking is required, and this kind of processing occurs when a person lacks the motivation or ability to process the message more deeply. The peripheral processing route is less likely to result in durable attitude change or to influence behavior. If there are systematic differences in broadcasters' facial expressions, the ELM predicts that these nonverbal cues would be processed by the peripheral route and thus, positive attitude change, if any, would be temporary and not predictive of behavior.

Early research into visual bias focused on the candidates themselves and the link was made between candidates' nonverbal cues and voters' perceptions (Abelson, Kinder,

Peters & Fiske, 1982; Kinder & Abelson, 1985; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987; Rosenberg, Bohan, McCafferty & Harris, 1986). With a connection between candidates' facial expressions and influence on voting firmly made, it seemed logical to consider whether voting behavior would also be influenced by facial expressions of broadcasters reporting on the candidates.

Friedman and colleagues began with a laboratory study that looked at whether the facial expressions of broadcasters was a function of the candidates during the 1976 presidential campaign. They found significant differences in the perceived positivity of the broadcasters' facial expressions, with Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, and Harry Reasoner showing more positive expressions toward Jimmy Carter, and John Chancellor's expressions favoring Gerald Ford. They found the verbal content of the news to be neutral. They concluded that "broadcasters do show systematic differences in their facial expressions when talking about the candidates and these differences can be readily detected by untrained observers" (Friedman, 1980b, p. 110). They went on to speculate, "it is probably more likely that many viewers' attitudes will be influenced at least somewhat by the nonverbal cues" (Friedman, 1980b, p. 110).

Mullen et al. took this statement to heart and attempted to link broadcasters' facial expressions to voting behavior to ascertain the extent of the influence of this nonverbal bias.

Media and individual effects

That researchers would connect voting behavior to television viewing is reasonable in light of the past evidence on media effects. Television, among other social changes, has

been linked with the increasing importance of a candidate's personal qualities on voting behavior (Keeter, 1987). While media can have powerful effects on voting behavior, so, too can individual attributes. Gender is one such variable that has consistently been shown to be related to differential voting behavior. In the 1996 presidential election, gender was a major factor, with election results documenting a significant difference in men's and women's voting patterns (Frankovic, 1999; Jamieson, Falk & Sherr, 1999; Andersen, 1999).

Other important variables that consistently show systematic differences in voting behavior include race, partisanship, income, educational attainment (Koch, 1998; Enelow, 1986) and ideology, measured as self-placement on the liberal-conservative scale (Enelow, 1986; Howell, 1985; Holm & Robinson, 1978; Palfrey & Poole, 1987).

It had become widely accepted by at least 1985 that attitudes toward candidates involved reciprocal effects (Howell, 1985; Canache, Mondak & Conroy, 1994).

As an example of how confounding it can be to predict voting behavior based on media exposure, Robinson (1972) found that voters tended to vote *against* the direction of perceived bias in television coverage once the effects of partisanship and other variables were removed.

Replication of the 1986 study

This replication takes into account conditions and variables the original study did not (Mullen et. al. 1986). A secondary analysis of the National Election Studies data from 1996 provides us with a national random sample of about 1,000 respondents unlike Mullen's smaller, non-random sample. It also allows us to conduct a multivariate study

that looks at the effects on vote choice of which major network nightly news broadcast the participants watch, gender, party identification, liberal to conservative leanings, education, income and race. Mullen's survey did not collect these data; these variables have repeatedly been shown to influence voting behavior, and frequently, other effects disappear or decrease when these variables are controlled.

Our visual bias study is a replication of the visual bias studies of both Friedman et al. (1980a; 1980b) and Mullen et al. (1986) using television newscasts from the 1996 election. The results of the Mullen study regarding the facial expression bias of broadcasters are plausible and convincing, and earlier studies found similar results (Friedman et al., 1980a & 1980b). This and the two previous studies used ordinary TV viewers in a quasi-experiment rather than trained coders in a content analysis because the question of interest is whether regular viewers *perceive* visual bias, not whether it exists using a researcher's objective criteria.

Our secondary analysis of the NES data replicates the voting behavior study of Mullen et al. (1986) using 1996 voting data and extends that study to include demographic variables. The conclusion that “regular viewing of a newscaster who exhibits facial expressions that are biased in favor of a particular political candidate is associated with an increased likelihood of voting for that political candidate” (Mullen et al., 1986, p. 294) is too important to be allowed to stand and be cited repeatedly without additional research that supports the same conclusion. To increase confidence in these results, they must be replicated. Mass media researchers largely underestimate the importance of replication, however, researchers in other disciplines “overwhelmingly advocate the use of replication to establish scientific fact” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000,

p. 38). This finding that shows viewing a broadcaster's biased facial expressions is associated with voting behavior has been unchallenged for over a decade and continues to be cited (Gladwell, 2000). This study attempts to rectify this, to add to the body of knowledge necessary for a fully informed conclusion, and to help fill the need for replication recognized by most other scientific disciplines.

The purpose of this study is to see whether ordinary viewers continued to perceive that network anchors had biased facial expressions toward a particular candidate in 1996 as was found in studies of previous elections, and whether watching a particular network newscaster with biased expressions influenced voting behavior, after controlling for individual differences including gender, race, political ideology, party identification, income, and education.

The hypotheses we wish to test are:

H1: Viewers perceive that network newscasters did exhibit biased facial expressions toward a particular candidate in the 1996 election.

H2: Watching a newscaster who exhibits facial expression bias toward a candidate did not significantly influence viewers to vote for that candidate in the 1996 election.

H3: Individual predispositions will explain more of the variance in voting behavior in the 1996 election than watching a particular network newscaster.

Methodology

This study will help reduce sample-specific results by looking at the 1996 presidential election. In the first part of this study, the visual bias methods of Friedman et al. (1980a;

1980b) and Mullen et al. (1986) were replicated exactly, with the addition of CNN's nightly newscast. Since the original studies were conducted, CNN has gained an impressive market share and the impact of this news outlet has been understudied. Following the methods of Friedman et al. (1980a & 1980b) and Mullen et al. (1986), 45 subjects, the same number used in the previous studies, were recruited from a large Midwestern university. Video of the nightly news shows on ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC for eight days prior to the 1996 presidential election was obtained from the Vanderbilt Television News Archives; eight days prior to the election was the same sample period used in the two studies this one aims to replicate. Two different types of segments were edited. Candidate segments were defined as when anchors referred to presidential candidates Bob Dole or Bill Clinton. Validity segments were defined as when the anchor discussed an unequivocally positive event (i.e.: Yankees ticker tape parade) or unequivocally negative event (i.e.: TWA 800 or fighting in Rwanda and Zaire). Validity segments were used to determine whether participants could successfully distinguish differences in the valence of the anchors' facial expressions during the discussion of events that would naturally elicit positive or negative emotional reactions.

Fifty-three segments were produced with each segment approximately 3 seconds long. In the original studies, the segments were 2.5 seconds long. Psychologists who specialize in the study of facial expressions routinely use stimuli of this short duration and have repeatedly shown that even expressions of a single second are accurately decoded by viewers (Rosenthal et. al., 1979; Ekman, 1972; Keating et. al., 1981). Because we were attempting to produce as exact a replication as possible, the number of segments and their length was kept as close as possible to those in the Mullen et al. study.

(Our study produced more segments than the other studies because of the addition of CNN). The volume was turned off while the participants independently rated the facial expressions exhibited in each segment. Ratings were on 21-point scales from extremely positive to extremely negative, also replicating the scales used in Mullen et al. (1986).

Because our study did find that visual bias still exists in the broadcasters' facial expressions, we then did a secondary analysis of the National Election Study data to see how TV anchor's facial bias compared with other variables in its effect on voting.

The secondary data analysis used the 1996 National Election Studies survey, which included a question asking what television news program the respondent most often watched. These data from the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan have been the staple of most voting behavior research conducted in the United States. The question, "Which of the TV news programs do you watch most often?" offered choices of ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS' McNeil-Lehrer Report, CNN, and none. In addition to which candidate the respondent voted for, the NES data included information on gender, race, party identification, liberal to conservative ideology, education, and income. By incorporating these variables, this study hoped to obtain a better understanding of the true relationship between TV news watching and voting.¹

Results

Visual Bias Study

The validity segment index scores, one positive and one negative, for each of the five anchors, were analyzed with paired samples t-tests. There were highly significant differences ($p < .001$) between positive and negative segments for four anchors and

significant differences for one ($p < .05$). (See Table 1). This indicates that participants could indeed reliably detect positive facial expressions when all the anchors were discussing positive emotional topics, and negative facial expressions when the anchors were discussing negative emotional topics. With the ability of participants to detect bias in facial expressions confirmed, we tested the hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1, that newscasters did exhibit biased facial expressions toward a particular candidate, was partially supported; 2 of 5 newscasters exhibited strong bias in favor of Dole.

Indexed scores for the Clinton segments and the Dole segments were derived for each of the five broadcasters. Paired sample t-tests showed highly significant differences ($p < .01$) for two of the five broadcasters; Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather both exhibited significantly more positive facial expressions when they mentioned Bob Dole than Bill Clinton. (See Table 2).

Hypothesis 2, that watching newscasters who exhibit biased expressions toward a candidate does not significantly influence viewers to vote for that candidate, was also supported. Secondary analysis of NES data showed no significant differences in voting for Clinton or Dole between viewers who watched broadcasters with biased facial expressions (Brokaw/ABC and Rather/CBS) and viewers who watched broadcasters with unbiased facial expressions (Jennings/NBC; Woodruff/CNN; Shaw/CNN).

In fact, analysis showed that significant differences in voting behavior were not among viewers of the networks whose anchors exhibited facial bias, nor were they among viewers of the three major networks. Instead, the significant differences were between the three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) on the one hand, and CNN and non-

watchers on the other ($X^2 = 3.79$, d.f. = 1, $p < .05$). In the 1996 election, ABC and CBS viewers who watched anchors with expressions biased toward Dole, and NBC viewers who watched an anchor with neutral expressions, all tended to vote primarily for Clinton. However, those who got their news mainly from CNN, whose anchors did not exhibit biased expressions, as well as those who watched no television news, voted primarily for Dole.² From these results, we see that viewers who watched newscasters whose facial expressions were biased in favor of Dole were not more likely to vote for Dole – only 37% of CBS watchers and 44% of NBC watchers voted for Dole (See Table 3). And, the big difference was not among ABC, CBS, and NBC watchers, but rather between them, on the one hand, and CNN and non-watchers on the other. However, these differences disappeared once other variables, such as gender, were introduced.

Hypothesis 3, that individual differences will explain more of the variance in voting behavior than watching a particular network newscaster, was also supported.

ANOVA results and Eta^2 , the measure of the percentage of variance that can be attributed to each variable, showed that which television news a person watched was the least important of the eight independent variables (See Table 3). Although significant at $p < .05$, the choice of television news program explains only 1.4% of the variance between Clinton voters and Dole voters. In contrast, all six other variables were significant at $p < .001$, with the greatest amount of variance – 61% – being explained by party i.d.

All six other variables do a better job of explaining variance in voting behavior than does choice of TV news program. Party identification explained 61% of the variance and liberal-conservative ideology explained 29%. Voters' support for government guaranteeing individuals a job and standard of living explained 17% of the variance,

followed by race (8% of variance explained), family income (5%), education (4%), and gender (almost 2%).

While Democrats and liberals voted quite differently from Republicans and conservatives, all four groups tended to share the same preference for TV news. NBC captured larger percentages of Democrats, Republicans, liberals, and conservatives than did other news shows – 29.5% of liberals, 27% of conservatives, 28% of Democrats and 28% of Republicans watched NBC. Moderates (33%) and Independents (26%) tended to tune in to CBS. (Table 4).

Logistic Regression Predicting Voting Behavior

A logistic regression analysis also bore out the idea that watching a particular TV news program is rather unimportant as a predictor of voting behavior compared with other variables such as demographics, ideology, and party identification³ (See Table 5). In a model with only TV news as predictor variables (model 1), those who watched ABC and CBS were significantly more likely to vote for Clinton ($p < .01$). The model was significant at $p < .05$. However, when gender, race, education, and family income were included, which TV news was watched became non-significant. In model 2, gender, race, and family income were all significant predictors of voting behavior. None of the TV news programs were significant.

In the full model (model 3), party identification was a highly significant predictor of voting behavior, controlling for ideology, demographics, and which TV news was watched. The model was highly significant at $p < .001$. In this full model, race is significant, as is liberal-conservative ideology. Education and family income become

non-significant, and all the TV news variables remain non-significant. The full model with gender, race, education, family income, ideology, and party identification is significantly better at predicting voting behavior than the reduced model with only the TV news watching variables since the Chi-square difference of 536.7 is greater than the critical Chi-square value of 20.09 at the 99th percentile with 8 degrees of freedom.

TV News Watching

That the media show a liberal bias is an enduringly popular notion, one that tends to run along ideological and party lines. This belief is kept alive despite studies that show most news coverage is actually fairly balanced (Dougherty, 1997). It may be partly explained by the preponderance of TV news viewers who say they are conservatives (Significant at $p < .05$). Of the CNN watchers, 63% were conservative. Conservatives also made up 60% of the CBS watchers, 58% of NBC watchers, and 55% of ABC watchers. Those who watched no TV news were also predominantly conservative – 61%. PBS's MacNeil-Lehrer Report was the only news show whose viewers were evenly split – 40% conservative and 40% liberal, with 20% declaring themselves moderates.

Discussion

The results of the visual bias study indicate that viewers can and do perceive biases in the facial expressions of broadcasters when they are referring to candidates. This is the third study to produce the same results in three different elections. Furthermore, in the two most recent of these studies, viewers indicated that the newscasters who exhibited biased facial expressions did so for the Republican candidates (Peter Jennings for Reagan in

1984; Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw for Dole in 1996). This finding goes against the public perception of a liberal media. This study did not explore the reasons for this, whether the positive expressions are due to bemusement or benevolence for a candidate who is clearly destined to lose, or a bend-over-backwards attempt to not show favoritism toward the anchor's preferred candidate that results in unintentional favoritism toward the other candidate, or some other reason. Whatever the explanation, there are important implications from the findings of biased facial expressions.

Explicit and implicit norms in broadcasting require fairness and objectivity regardless of personal feelings. Bias in broadcasting is a frequent topic of discussion in professional journals and seminars, but it usually revolves around giving candidates equal numbers and length of stories, making sure candidate references are fairly placed within the story and news show, and avoiding biased language. Rarely do articles discuss facial expressions of broadcasters as a source of bias. Perhaps this seems so obvious to professionals that they consider it unnecessary to discuss. While it may be obvious that displaying *overtly* biases facial expressions is to be avoided, what is apparently not obvious to broadcasters is just how *subtle* a facial expression can be and still be detected by viewers. This study and two previous studies show that broadcasters are not as successful at projecting neutrality in their facial expressions as they may think. This information should stimulate television news journalists to pay more attention to their facial expressions and to learn methods for masking facial expressions that have been developed by psychologists.

Broadcasters need to be aware that facial bias on their part, no matter how subtle, can and is detected by untrained viewers. That it holds little sway over their voting

behavior, as this study shows, is beside the point; in order to maintain credibility with audiences professional journalists need to be impartial not only in what they say but also in how they appear.

In addition, this study is important because rarely does research investigate the influence of visual images on television news separately from the verbal information (Graber, 1993; Graber, 1988). The visual bias study of this research helps fill that void.

The lesson from the secondary analysis of voting data is that which TV news a voter watches can indeed be an important force in political decision-making, but it is only one of many forces, and from these data, it may be among the least important of all or even insignificant altogether when other factors are considered. The case for media coverage *alone* affecting voting choice is more adequately made by time series' studies such as Domke's and colleagues (1997) which also took into account individual characteristics such as gender, party affiliation, education, and income.

We acknowledge the limitations of this study; the connection between visual bias of broadcasters and voting behavior of viewers is inadequate in this and the Mullen study. In the interest of scientific replication principles, we adhered to the methodology of the Mullen study in our choice of number and length of segments and number of study participants. In reality, television news viewers see more than the two-and-a-half or three silent seconds of a newscaster's facial expression. When real viewers watch campaign coverage, they also see and hear the candidates, not to mention the commercials for and against each. A large body of research proves the importance of candidates' appearance on voter choice (Domke et al., 1997; Rosenberg et al., 1987; Abelson et al., 1982; Kinder & Abelson, 1985). Studies that link bias in newscasters' expressions to vote choice fail to

consider that actual voters are also being influenced by the candidate's appearance, among other things. Perhaps Dole and Clinton smiled more than their opponents and that was picked up by viewers more so than the smiling of the news anchors. It is also possible that the combination of candidates' and broadcasters' visual cues together had an effect that was greater than either alone. Future studies should examine this question under more realistic conditions and more tightly controlled studies would be needed to separate the effects of facial expressions of newscasters from candidate appearance effects. Nevertheless, this study is important because it helps clarify the findings of the only other study to link newscasters' facial expressions with voting (Mullen et al., 1986).

Under the Elaboration Likelihood Model, visual bias is processed as peripheral cues rather than as message content. If there *are* any cues present that would imply a persuasive message, such as positive facial expressions of newscasters, then positive attitude change can be expected via the peripheral route. However, this attitude change is temporary, vulnerable, and not as predictive of behavior as attitude change that results from central route processing. Using the ELM, visual bias *alone* would seem an unlikely source of attitude change that affects a behavior so irrevocable as casting a vote.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this analysis show newscasters do exhibit bias in their facial expressions and that bias is indeed detected by viewers. But these results do not support a link between newscaster's facial bias and voting behavior. These results do show that which TV news show a voter watches is important; people who watched the three major networks were more likely to support Clinton in 1996 than people who watched CNN or

no TV news programs. But other variables are also important determinants of the vote. These results suggest that individual characteristics such as income, education, party identification and ideology may even be more important than which TV news show is watched.

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FOOTNOTES

1. The dependent variable is v961082, which candidate respondent voted for. Independent variables are: v961328, which TV news respondent watched most; v960368, self-rating on a seven-point liberal-to-conservative scale; v960610, educational attainment; v960701, family income collapsed into 10 categories; v960066, gender; v960067, race; and v960420, party identification.
2. Perot voters were dropped from the analysis because Perot was far weaker as a candidate in 1996 than in 1992; Perot received 8.5% of the vote in 1996 compared with almost 19% in 1992. R. Dougherty, E.C. Ladd, D. Wilber and L. Zayachkiwsky, *America at the Polls: 1996*, (Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1997). This also allows for a dichotomous dependent variable for analysis of variance.
3. No multicollinearity was detected as no bivariate correlations were greater than .75, tolerance values were close to 1 and not less than .01, and VIF levels were close to 1 and not greater than 10.

Table 1
*T-tests and means for validity segments
of newscasters' facial expressions*

| | Means | t (d.f.) |
|-------------------|-------|-----------|
| Jennings-positive | 16.67 | 10.978 ** |
| Jennings-negative | 9.69 | (44) |
| Brokaw-positive | 15.87 | 10.521** |
| Brokaw-negative | 9.91 | (44) |
| Rather-positive | 17.67 | 10.926** |
| Rather-negative | 9.46 | (44) |
| Shaw-positive | 12.24 | 2.605* |
| Shaw-negative | 11.38 | (44) |
| Woodruff-positive | 13.91 | 9.429** |
| Woodruff-negative | 7.76 | (44) |

* p < .01 ** p < .001

Table 2
*T-tests and means for candidate segments
of newscasters' facial expressions*

| | Means | t (d.f.) |
|------------------|-------|----------|
| Jennings-Clinton | 12.17 | -.101 |
| Jennings-Dole | 12.19 | (44) |
| Brokaw-Clinton | 11.09 | -9.126** |
| Brokaw-Dole | 13.76 | (44) |
| Rather-Clinton | 10.66 | -2.931* |
| Rather-Dole | 11.27 | (44) |
| Shaw-Clinton | 10.57 | -1.414 |
| Shaw-Dole | 10.83 | (44) |
| Woodruff-Clinton | 10.56 | .529 |
| Woodruff-Dole | 10.46 | (44) |

* p < .01 ** p < .001

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TABLE 3
*Voting Behavior in Percentages, by TV News Watched,
 Demographics, Party ID, and Ideology, and One-Way ANOVA
 Results of Voting for Clinton or Dole in 1996*

| | n | Clinton | Dole | F value (d.f.) | Eta ² |
|-------------------------|-----|---------|------|-------------------|------------------|
| TV News Watched | | | | 2.63* | .014 |
| N=911 | | | | (5) | |
| ABC | 214 | 61 | 39 | | |
| NBC | 254 | 56 | 44 | | |
| CBS | 215 | 63 | 37 | | |
| CNN | 88 | 49 | 51 | | |
| PBS | 20 | 55 | 45 | | |
| None | 120 | 46 | 54 | | |
| Sex N=1034 | | | | 17.41*** | .017 |
| Male | 470 | 51 | 49 | (1) | |
| Female | 564 | 64 | 36 | | |
| Race N=1031 | | | | 87.20*** | .080 |
| White | 900 | 53 | 47 | (1) | |
| Black | 105 | 99 | 1 | | |
| Ideology N=1010 | | | | 207.24*** | .292 |
| Liberal | 324 | 94 | 6 | (2) | |
| Moderate | 83 | 69 | 31 | | |
| Conservative | 603 | 36 | 64 | | |
| Party ID N=1033 | | | | 815.3*** | .610 |
| Democrat | 541 | 94 | 6 | (2) | |
| Republican | 447 | 15 | 85 | | |
| Independent | 45 | 49 | 51 | | |
| Education N=1032 | | | | 10.24*** | .040 |
| Less than | | | | (4) | |
| high school | 103 | 84 | 16 | | |
| High school grad | 280 | 61 | 39 | | |
| Some college | 289 | 56 | 44 | | |
| College degree | 228 | 48 | 52 | | |
| Graduate degree | 132 | 52 | 48 | | |
| Income N=943 | | | | 5.82*** | .053 |
| \$0-\$9,999 | 86 | 81 | 19 | (9) | |
| \$10,000-\$19,999 | 133 | 71 | 29 | | |
| \$20,000-\$29,999 | 133 | 62 | 38 | | |
| \$30,000-\$39,999 | 138 | 56 | 44 | | |
| \$40,000-\$49,999 | 107 | 56 | 44 | | |
| \$50,000-\$59,999 | 95 | 53 | 47 | | |
| \$60,000-\$74,999 | 97 | 44 | 56 | | |
| \$75,000-\$89,999 | 55 | 53 | 47 | | |
| \$90,000-\$104,000 | 34 | 38 | 62 | | |
| \$105,000 up | 65 | 45 | 55 | | |

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

NOTE: Row percentages total 100. e.g.: Democrats voting for Clinton, 94%, plus Democrats voting for Dole, 6% = 100%.

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TABLE 4

TV News Watching Behavior, in Percentages, by Demographics, Party ID, and Ideology

| | n | ABC | NBC | CBS | CNN | PBS | NONE | X ² (d.f.) |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|--------------------------|
| Sex | | | | | | | | 29.9*** (5) |
| N=1345 | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 596 | 21 | 25 | 22 | 13 | 3 | 16 | |
| Female | 749 | 23 | 29 | 27 | 6 | 1 | 14 | |
| Race | | | | | | | | 19.47*** (5) |
| N=1303 | | | | | | | | |
| White | 1155 | 22 | 27 | 24 | 9 | 2 | 16 | |
| Black | 148 | 28 | 26 | 34 | 4 | 1 | 7 | |
| Ideology | | | | | | | | 18.37* (10) |
| N=1301 | | | | | | | | |
| Liberal | 424 | 24.5 | 29.5 | 21 | 9 | 2 | 14 | |
| Moderate | 121 | 24 | 22 | 33 | 4 | 4 | 13 | |
| Conservative | 756 | 22 | 27 | 25 | 10 | 1 | 15 | |
| Party ID | | | | | | | | 18.16 (10) |
| N=1331 | | | | | | | | |
| Democrat | 698 | 25 | 28 | 25 | 7 | 2 | 13 | |
| Republican | 524 | 20 | 28 | 24 | 12 | 1 | 15 | |
| Independent | 109 | 21 | 20 | 26 | 11 | 4 | 18 | |
| Education | | | | | | | | 84.99*** (20) |
| N=1343 | | | | | | | | |
| Less than high school | 170 | 23 | 25 | 38 | 3 | 1 | 10 | |
| High school graduate | 418 | 23 | 29 | 29 | 7 | 0 | 12 | |
| Some college | 372 | 25 | 27 | 19 | 10 | 1 | 18 | |
| College degree | 244 | 20 | 27 | 18 | 12 | 5 | 18 | |
| Graduate degree | 139 | 20 | 24 | 22 | 14 | 5 | 15 | |
| Income | | | | | | | | 99.5*** (45) |
| N=1231 | | | | | | | | |
| \$0-\$9,999 | 143 | 30 | 28 | 28 | 3 | 1 | 10 | |
| \$10,000-\$19,999 | 200 | 19 | 31.5 | 31.5 | 5 | 0 | 13 | |
| \$20,000-\$29,999 | 177 | 23 | 27 | 31 | 6 | 2 | 11 | |
| \$30,000-\$39,999 | 184 | 23 | 29 | 26 | 7 | 0 | 15 | |
| \$40,000-\$49,999 | 136 | 21 | 24 | 24 | 11 | 2 | 18 | |
| \$50,000-\$59,999 | 104 | 25 | 22 | 21 | 13 | 3 | 16 | |
| \$60,000-\$74,999 | 119 | 23 | 27 | 19 | 17 | 2 | 12 | |
| \$75,000-\$89,999 | 63 | 22 | 30 | 21 | 16 | 3 | 8 | |
| \$90,000-\$104,000 | 42 | 12 | 24 | 14 | 17 | 5 | 28 | |
| \$105,000 up | 63 | 18 | 25 | 11 | 13 | 8 | 25 | |

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

NOTE: Row percentages total 100. e.g.: Males watching ABC, 21%, NBC, 25%, CBS, 22%, CNN, 13%, PBS, 3%, and None, 16% = 100%.

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TABLE 5

*Logistic Regression of Voting for Clinton or Dole
By TV News Watched, Demographics, Ideology, and Party ID
(unstandardized regression coefficients)*

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | n = 911 | n = 801 | n = 638 |
| Intercept | -.17 | 4.82*** | 6.85*** |
| TV NEWS | | | |
| TV1 (ABC) | .63** | .46 | .95 |
| TV2 (NBC) | .42 | .26 | .41 |
| TV3 (CBS) | .69** | .33 | .18 |
| TV4 (CNN) | .12 | .03 | .67 |
| TV5 (PBS) | .37 | .23 | -.43 |
| Omitted—No TV Watched | | | |
| DEMOGRAPHICS | | | |
| Gender (1=Male) | --- | -.37* | .06 |
| Race (1 = White) | --- | -4.01*** | -3.85** |
| Education | --- | -.12 | -.26 |
| Family Income | --- | -.09** | .03 |
| IDEOLOGY | | | |
| Liberal-Conservative | --- | --- | -.80*** |
| PARTY ID | | | |
| Party1 (1=Democrat) | --- | --- | 2.37*** |
| Party2 (1=Republican) | --- | --- | -1.40*** |
| Omitted - Independent | | | |
| -2 Log Likelihood | 1232.71 | 974.35 | 332.49 |
| Model χ^2 | 13.00* | 119.51*** | 549.70*** |

p < .05* p < .01** p < .001***

NOTE: The dependent variable, voting behavior, is coded 1 = Clinton, 0 = Dole

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The Real Ted Baxter: The Rise of the Celebrity Anchorman

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Chapter Four: The Real Ted Baxter

The Rise of the Celebrity Anchorman

*"I became... a different breed of celebrity, one who was a television news reporter... I got the credit although it was television that really made everything happen."*¹

--Stan Chambers, KTLA newsman

The word "anchorman" was coined in 1952 by CBS executive Sig Mickelson to define Walter Cronkite's role in network coverage of the national political conventions. As he ascended to the anchor chair of the CBS Evening News, "the most trusted man in America,"² personified the image of the credible network newsman, knowledgeable about the issues and dedicated to the highest ideals of broadcast journalism. The image of the white, male anchor still dominates the network evening newscasts with Dan Rather, Peter Jennings and Tom Brokaw nearly five decades later.

On the local level, popular culture developed a very different image of the anchorman: Ted Baxter, played by Ted Knight as the pompous newsreader for fictional Minneapolis station WJM on the Mary Tyler Moore Show. Ask almost anyone who was working anywhere in local television news in the 1960s and 70s and they'll swear that *their* anchorman was the *real* Ted Baxter. The local anchor was also lampooned by Chevy Chase and others on the "Weekend Update" segment of NBC's "Saturday Night Live" and later by the animated character of Kent Brockman on the Fox TV series "The Simpsons." Why did the network television news anchor evolve as an icon of

respectability, while the local broadcast news anchor came to be regarded as merely a figurehead, a blow-dried reader of news?

Part of the answer lies in Los Angeles, where the creators of the Mary Tyler Moore Show drew inspiration from two familiar personalities on the local news, George Putnam and Jerry Dunphy. But the image of the local anchorman evolved with television news from its beginning. As film director and TV historian Michael Ritchie has observed, "The extraordinary fact of the slow development of television news was that it took a long time for everybody -- programmers, advertisers and viewers, -- to realize the full impact of a statement of 'fact' by a face on a television tube." The two "real" Ted Baxters represented conflicting visions of the anchor's role: should the anchor lead and shape the broadcast with personality and opinion, or serve only as a reader, putting a face on the collective output of an entire news organization?

Early TV News Announcers

In the early days it was not obvious that television anchormen would someday command million-dollar salaries at the networks and in the largest TV markets. As late as 1949, some stations did without on-camera talent, simply broadcasting the text from a wire service news ticker. An off-camera announcer might narrate film footage or read wire copy while a "news" slide filled the screen. "There was no attempt to gather news or rewrite the wire copy," recalled George Eisenhauer, who read the news on DuMont's WDTV in Pittsburgh. "Everything was ripped and read... but the weather, and you looked out the window to get that."³

Most early TV programmers envisioned some type of on-camera news presenter but the exact nature of the role was open to debate. "Should the central figure be a

ringmaster to drive the program forward or a guide and interpreter... a father figure, a show business personality, a star, a widely known reporter, or a competent news reader? No one was quite sure," Mickelson recalled. "The staff tried an elderly man with a beard, an aggressive young sportswriter from a New York daily newspaper, and finally a number of staff announcers who were professional performers. It was quickly determined that they still did not have an answer."⁴

The most successful announcers were on the radio and their skills didn't always translate well to the new medium. One radio broadcaster appeared on a local television news program in 1939 and was panned in the New York Times: "... a new, more informal and natural style must be developed for such telecasts. Spectators agreed that reading, with his head bobbing up and down and occasionally looking up from the paper did not fit the intimate medium of broadcasting."⁵

The popularity of radio in the 1930s and 1940s made it hard to imagine that a television news program would ever draw a bigger audience than one of Edward R. Murrow's dramatic wartime reports. Although most local radio news announcers followed the "rip and read" format, the emergence of an elite corps of "Murrow's boys" at CBS added a veneer of respectability to radio. Top radio journalists sometimes doubled as voiceover announcers for motion picture newsreels, but they shunned television. CBS officials took this into account when choosing Douglas Edwards as their first TV news announcer. "It was clearly necessary to select one of the lesser lights who would feel he had nothing to lose by being identified with an environment that was considered too frivolous by the elite of the staff," Mickelson explained. For new talent, the networks also

looked to the few local TV stations in operation. Cronkite was plucked from local station WTOP in Washington, DC.⁶

John Cameron Swayze debuted as "the first regular newscaster on TV" in 1937. Experimental W9XAC in Kansas City aired a ten-minute news program three days a week. The announcer was "a soggy mess" when the show was over. The newsman painted his eyebrows black to keep them from being singed off by the hot lights. "The work was relatively simple," said Swayze. "I just read the news right out of the paper."⁷ Swayze would go on to anchor NBC's Camel News Caravan. He was a non-smoker but many viewers thought he smoked because the show concluded with the image of a burning cigarette in an ashtray. He memorized all of his copy and used catch phrases such as "hop-scotching the world for headlines." Meticulous about his appearance, he wore a toupee, changed his tie every day and wore a flower in his lapel, much to the annoyance of colleagues who considered him "more a performer than a newsman."⁸

Moviegoers of the 1930s and 40s were familiar with newsroom scenes of working print reporters and editors as characters in popular films.⁹ To add the drama of news-in-the-making and give their television announcers more credibility, Chicago's WBKB put the first two-man news team in a newsroom setting. "Cubberly and Campbell" appeared in shirtsleeves with the sound of typewriters and ringing telephones in the background, but not because they were actually gathering the news themselves. General Manager William Eddy explained the "News Desk" format this way: "This double feature allows one actor to consider his lines as well as the picture. While his colleague is talking, there is an opportunity for him to develop well thought out questions and answers to sustain the interest of the audience." In addition to the two male "actors," WBKB also had a woman

war correspondent on the staff who used a direct ad-lib approach, speaking directly to the camera. Ann Hunter thus became "not only an interesting commentator, but a particularly charming and acceptable picture as well."¹⁰ But such experimentation was rare. Typical local news broadcasts focused on a single male announcer at a desk.

The anchor as pitchman

Advertising loomed large from the very first commercial TV news broadcast in 1941 on New York's WNBT. By contract, the distinguished radio newsman Lowell Thomas was upstaged by a stack of oil cans on the "Sunoco News."¹¹

Gil Martyn, a former NBC radio newsman and voice of the Paramount Newsreel, plugged Rancho Soups, the company that sponsored his newscast on KTLA. Reading the news with dramatic flair, the tall, dignified newsman would pause to sip soup and even comment on how good it tasted. Far from appearing tacky in 1948, the station considered it a prestigious accomplishment to have a sponsored news program. The soup tasting was a nightly ritual on the most-watched evening news program in Los Angeles.¹² In the 1950s, Chicago's Fahey Flynn delivered the Windy City's top-rated news on WBBM while sharing the screen with a Standard Oil logo.

Some advertisements were delivered like news stories. Stan Chambers appeared on KTLA in a trenchcoat as a reporter "covering" comic attempts to promote Butternut Coffee with skywriting. Even the distinguished foreign correspondent Clete Roberts could not avoid plugging "the most dramatic success story in Buick's history" during a local TV news program. Beside him on the news desk was a pile of papers said to be press releases, glowing articles and telegrams from dealers, tall enough to hide an unidentified assistant standing behind it.¹³ Stations who had weathermen used them as

billboards for sponsoring products, typified by Philadelphia's Herb Clarke delivering his forecast on WCAU in the uniform of a Texaco gas station attendant.

Looks and Personality

TV stations hired news readers with booming radio voices, but programmers noticed that personality was also important. NBC officials in New York noted a positive audience response when Lowell Thomas closed his broadcast with a wink. It made him "a member of the audience group rather than merely a picture traced in electrons."¹⁴

In Los Angeles, personality and good looks counted more than a journalistic background. Actor Dick Lane, who appeared in over 250 films and frequently portrayed a journalist in the movies, was one of the first TV newsmen at the experimental station on the Paramount Studios lot, which would become KTLA. He also introduced televised wrestling to the nation as the announcer who made "Gorgeous George" a household word in the 1940s. But because of his outstanding ability to ad-lib, the popular Lane also drew top news assignments.

Keith Hetherington, who had been a news announcer and disc jockey for KMPC radio, joined KTLA in 1945. Good looks were part of his appeal, according to a TELE-vue Magazine. "Tall, well-built and with a pleasant personality," the article said, "he is 41 -- and doesn't look it." Owned by a movie studio accustomed to public curiosity about its film stars, KTLA provided fan magazines with personal details about its TV personalities. Both Lane and Hetherington were promoted in the press as married men with children, exemplifying the family values of the post-World War II period.

But neither man was selected in a 1950 contest to name "the most attractive man on television today." Martha D. Jones of El Monte, California, won \$5 for her prize-

winning letter: "He is handy handsome and hospitable. His name is suggested at the mere sight of a television antenna. Children cry for him, men envy him, women love him! Who is he? Why he is the A-1 ad-libber, the charming gentleman M.C., the Robert Taylor of video -- KTLA's own Personality Kid, Stan Chambers."¹⁵

Chambers was one of the first newsmen to gain a foothold in TV without an extensive background in radio or newspaper journalism. He joined KTLA straight out of college in 1947, working as a production assistant while he waited for his big break on the air.¹⁶ Chambers achieved instant fame in 1949 when he was on the air for more than 27 continuous hours covering the attempted rescue of three year old Kathy Fiscus from an abandoned well.

Chambers' boss was Klaus Landsberg, the visionary German immigrant who launched KTLA as the first commercial TV station west of the Mississippi. He believed viewers would shun pretentious on-air talent and would "much rather find a warm, friendly personality on the air that's considered one of them -- one they welcome in their homes..."¹⁷ As Landsberg predicted, viewers developed a personal relationship with Stan. If he read the news with a sniffle, they stopped by the studio with cold remedies. He was reporting on a beached whale in Santa Monica when a fly flew into his mouth. He continued his report while coughing and choking. "Mr. Chambers was so moved by the plight of the whale that he was in tears," an admiring viewer wrote to the station. "God bless him."¹⁸

What Barbara Matusow observed about network anchors in "The Evening Stars," was even more true of local news announcers: "In the early days of television, the evening newscast was so primitive technically, so lacking in journalistic credibility, that

the men who read the news were relatively humble figures. They were popular with the public, somewhat in the manner that game show hosts develop a following."¹⁹ Indeed, Chambers was typical of many early newsmen who actually hosted game shows on the side, including Mike Wallace in New York and Bill Burns in Pittsburgh.

Leaders vs. Readers

Despite the importance of looks and personality in a visual medium, early TV news announcers were also expected to have some journalistic ability. William Ray, the news director of the NBC station in Chicago, believed, "Television news requires the services of a newsman who can ad-lib his own show in front of the camera after selecting the news and writing his script in advance."²⁰ In the early 1950s, WNBP's Clifton Utley in Chicago was typical of TV newsmen who controlled the content of their programs. That didn't stop one critic from complaining that "you can't recall much about the news of the day, although you may remember all about Clifton Utley's haircut..."²¹

The lifting of the FCC's freeze on new licenses in 1953 meant that most sizable cities would have more than one TV station. Licensing requirements forced all stations to make some effort in news and it kept the budget down if the anchorman could write his own copy and develop news sources. In Pittsburgh, KDKA's Burns gained a reputation for aggressive newsgathering. "He knew everybody in the city of Pittsburgh," said colleague George Eisenhauer. "So he had a natural edge on everybody else in the news business." Burns also ventured out into the field with a film crew to shoot interviews, a rare initiative in the early days of bulky sound equipment. He would be the dominant local news figure in Pittsburgh for 40 years.²²

However, the man who ruled Chicago's local news on WBBM from 1953 to 1968 didn't cover stories or write his own copy. Former radio announcer Fahey Flynn relied on a staff of writers, rehearsed with three cameras to perfect his delivery and mastered the use of the teleprompter. The genial Irishman greeted viewers with his trademark bow tie and a cheery "How do you do, ladies and gentlemen." WBBM's news director boasted that the staff could "write so well that you'd swear Flynn was ad-libbing."²³

As late as 1960, a survey revealed that nearly all TV news personalities in Chicago had some type of background in radio or print journalism. "The trend that emerged was that of a combination of sound newsman and effective broadcast communicator," observed one Chicago broadcast historian. "He sounds as if he knows what he's talking about' became evidence of success."²⁴ Whether he was producing his own material or relying on skilled copywriters, the image of the local news anchor had quickly fulfilled an early prediction that TV audiences would demand news presenters who at least appeared to possess superhuman qualities:

"The television announcer must be well informed; he must be a quick thinker, nimble witted, and must choose words that fit the picture... he should be infinite in faculty, and in apprehension like a god."²⁵

If this had been a help-wanted ad, George Putnam would have answered it.

George Putnam

Born in 1914, Putnam grew up in Minnesota during the Depression. Family financial difficulties forced young George to postpone law school. On his 20th birthday, he got a job at 1,000-watt Minneapolis radio station WDGY, earning \$22.50 a week. "I figured, I have a big mouth, I can make it in broadcasting," he recalled.²⁶ Putnam quickly moved on to a bigger station, WSTP in St. Paul. In 1939 he competed with 20

other finalists and won a staff announcer position with NBC in New York. He also became one of the voices of the Hearst Movietone Newsreel and counted William Randolph Hearst, Lowell Thomas and Walter Winchell among his mentors.

"Walter Winchell made my career," he recalled years later. "The thing that gave me attention was he called me 'the greatest voice in American radio.' I went from \$190 a month at NBC to better than \$200,000 a year, which was too much for a 24-year-old kid out of Minnesota."²⁷

During World War II Putnam served as a first lieutenant in the Marine Corps and logged 20,000 miles on behalf of Armed Forces Radio. His marriage to a female war correspondent dissolved into a nasty custody battle over the couple's four-year-old daughter. Tragically, the child died in the hospital after a tonsillectomy. "She was left alone and bled to death," Putnam remembered. "I fell apart. I just absolutely fell apart."²⁸ The grieving father wanted a fresh start. He packed up his convertible and headed for Los Angeles. In 1951 he was hired as the newscaster for KTTV Channel 11, an independent local station owned by the Los Angeles Times newspaper.

Putnam achieved the star status of having his name appear in the title of his broadcast, "George Putnam and the News." He quickly developed a following in Hollywood. He appeared as himself in movies, including "Fourteen Hours," which introduced Grace Kelly in 1951 and "I Want to Live," which won an Academy Award for Susan Hayward in 1958. His star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame is located between the stars for actor Mickey Rooney and actor-turned-politician Ronald Reagan. His high profile helped Putnam snag interviews with the famous and powerful, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Robert F. Kennedy and every U.S. President from Herbert Hoover to

George Bush. When President Richard Nixon called for an update on the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, Putnam took the opportunity to question Nixon about U.S. policy in Cambodia. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir gave Putnam her recipe for chicken soup.

Sam Zelman, a former newspaperman who was working for ABC-owned KECA in the 1950s, observed Putnam's rise in Los Angeles. Zelman said Putnam "introduced the flair and the personality cult into television in that he was very dramatic in his presentation." Zelman suggested that appearing on independent KTTV gave Putnam more freedom to experiment than his counterparts at network-owned stations. "He developed a more conversational style than the style that was common at the time, which was newspaper style... cold-blooded sentences." Zelman, who would eventually become news director at KNXT, credited Putnam with writing "passionate sentences."²⁹

Putnam also transcended the standard of "objective" reporting and publicly took sides, concluding his broadcast with a commentary called "One Reporter's Opinion." He crusaded on behalf of Hungarian freedom fighters and Soviet Jews as well as numerous local issues. "He always felt the responsibility of a television news reporter extends beyond the mere parrot-like recitation of the day's events," said Gary Owens, the Los Angeles radio announcer who would become the voice of the hit 1960's comedy show "Laugh-In." He said Putnam believed it was "his privilege and responsibility to right wrongs and to nudge the public conscience."³⁰

Putnam's advocacy was most notable in the 1961 Los Angeles mayor's race, which pitted incumbent Norris Poulson against City Councilman Pat McGee and businessman Sam Yorty. Putnam defied the endorsement of the Los Angeles Times, which owned KTTV and backed Poulson. The anchorman disliked the incumbent and

offered to put the two challengers on the news every night until the primary. McGee declined to appear after the first two nights, so Putnam continued the segment by giving Yorty one minute of free airtime each night for two weeks. Yorty advanced to a runoff and defeated Poulson.³¹ The newspapers ran a victory photograph showing "Sam and George together in triumph, despite the opinions of his (Putnam's) employers."³²

Management put up with Putnam's opinions because he drew a big enough audience to make his newscast profitable. At one point in the 1960s, his salary reached \$350,000, making him the country's highest paid newscaster. "Walter Cronkite asked me what I made," Putnam recalled. "He told me he was making only \$125,000."³³ After 14 years at KTTV, Putnam defected to rival KTLA in 1965. He returned to KTTV for more money three years later, finally landing at KTLA again in 1971. A 1984 Putnam tribute included humorous footage of the newsman repeatedly "crossing the street" between the neighboring rival stations, making more money each time. "George, you taught us all how to do that!" exclaimed KNBC's Kelly Lange, one of the first women to anchor a newscast in Los Angeles. "Follow the money," Putnam retorted.

"The guy was worth it because he had the ratings," said Hal Fishman, who teamed with Putnam at KTLA. "He brought in an enormous amount of money."³⁴

As a child of the Depression, Putnam took pride in his political heritage as a Roosevelt Democrat. He also set up a scholarship program for inner-city youth in the aftermath of the Watts riots. However, his pro-war stance in the 1960s riled audiences in the Vietnam era and caused Putnam to be labeled a conservative. "I've been called many things in my career," he told the Los Angeles Times, "right-wing extremist, super-patriot, goose-stepping nationalist, jingoistic SOB. And those are some of the nice things!"³⁵

But even Putnam was surprised when his larger-than-life persona provided the initial inspiration for an icon of popular culture.

Ted Baxter

America's best-known local television newsroom never really existed, except in the situation comedy world of the Mary Tyler Moore Show. Co-creators James L. Brooks and Allan Burns were on a tight deadline to come up with a weekly comedy series for Mary Tyler Moore, best known to audiences as the perky young wife on the Dick Van Dyke Show. The creative duo struggled with CBS executives who opposed casting Moore as a divorced woman on the new show, fearing that audiences would think the beloved Laura and Rob Petrie had split up. Divorce still carried a stigma in 1970, so the producers settled on the character of Mary Richards, a 30-year-old single, working woman. But what kind of job would she have? After discarding the idea of making her a researcher for a newspaper gossip columnist, they settled on a TV newsroom. There was also the question of geographic setting. According to Allan Burns, WJM-TV was located in Minneapolis because "the major industry is snow removal" and the creative team "wanted to trap the characters indoors. We wanted the audience to feel comfortable about a series that seldom ventured outside."³⁶ But Burns and Brooks only had to turn on their TV sets in Los Angeles to find a model for the character of WJM anchorman, Ted Baxter. "It was going to be Putnam," Burns recalled. "He seemed to be such a pompous ass."³⁷

Like Putnam, the character of Ted Baxter lacked a college education, got his start in radio and loved to talk about it. "It all started in a small 5,000-watt radio station in Fresno, California..." he would say, only to be interrupted by newsroom characters who

weren't interested or tired of hearing about it. In one episode Baxter explained to a reporter that he got into television because God told him he was too handsome for radio.

Except for Brooks, who had worked in a TV newsroom in New York, the show's creative team needed more information to make the characters authentic. By coincidence, Mary Tyler Moore's Aunt Bertie worked as the secretary to the general manager of KNXT, the CBS-owned station in Los Angeles. "Bertie gave us carte blanche to come over there and hang out," Burns said. "We watched all of the people in the newsroom and one of them was Jerry Dunphy. He struck us as being incredibly stupid, all the things that Putnam was except that he added the dividend of showing off all the time."

Jerry Dunphy was the leading anchor on *The Big News*, the nation's first one-hour, local newscast launched by KNXT in 1960. It was a team effort, including sports with Gil Stratton and Bill Keene's pun-filled weather forecast. Dunphy was surrounded over the years by a strong cast of correspondents such as Joseph Benti, Bill Stout, Maury Green, Ruth Ashton-Taylor and Ralph Story. As *Big News* veteran Howard Gingold pointed out, "It was hard not to do a news broadcast that set standards of excellence" with "a peerless collection of producers and writers" to prepare Dunphy's scripts.³⁸

By the time the writers for the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* arrived in 1970 to observe the news operation at KNXT, former CBS reporter Grant Holcomb had become the news director. According to Burns, Holcomb was the inspiration for the character played by Ed Asner, WJM news director Lou Grant. "He had this kind of beagle face," Burns explained, "and Jerry, knowing we were there, would show off by making Grant -- that's where we got Mr. Grant -- feel small."

Burns recalled one day when Dunphy complained about the thickness of the paper in the teleprompter. "He would say, 'Grant, this paper is too thin, get heavier paper.' He was always preening like a rooster, and he just gave us a lot of material. When Ted Knight read for us, he had that slightly vague, dumb quality."

Born Tadeus Wladyslw Konopka in 1923, Knight had done a little news announcing on a small station back home in Connecticut. The distinguished-looking actor had played bit parts for years and was having trouble finding work in films when he read for the TV role. The producers had considered casting a younger actor as Ted Baxter, envisioning the handsome-but-vacuous anchor Brooks would later develop as the character played by William Hurt in the movie "Broadcast News." But the white-haired Knight, who physically resembled both Dunphy and Putnam, won the part.

"We still kept some elements of Putnam," Burns explained. "The two are not dissimilar, the physical thing with the white hair and *that voice*, but we never adopted his (Putnam's) right-wing views." As played by Knight, Ted Baxter was "a mass of insecurities. There was an episode where Mary discovered why Ted never took a vacation. They made him take a vacation and he said he was going to Mexico, but they got postcards that were postmarked in Minneapolis and he was watching the guy who subbed for him while he was gone."

Jerry Dunphy

Like Putnam and the fictional Baxter, Dunphy came from humble beginnings. Born in Milwaukee in 1921, he enlisted in the military prior to the U.S. entry into World War II because he needed the money. He served as an Air Force bombardier and studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin on the GI Bill. He began broadcasting at small

radio stations, reading the farm news on WHA and WIBU in Madison. He moved up to a larger station in Davenport, Iowa, and became known as "Five-W Dunphy," promoting the journalism mantra of "who, what, when where and why" in his newscasts. But when he traveled to Los Angeles in the early 1950s and tried to make it as a radio announcer, the only work he could find was selling wholesale appliances as a manufacturer's representative. He returned to the Midwest, working in the sales department at his old station in Iowa until he was hired to organize a news department for a TV station in Peoria, Illinois. His next stop was anchoring at a failing TV station in Wichita, Kansas. "It went into the toilet," he recalled, but years later Dunphy would point to this early hands-on experience as evidence that he could do more than just read the teleprompter.³⁹

He auditioned for the CBS station in Milwaukee and won a news announcing job on his second try. But the big money was in Chicago. Dunphy couldn't compete with the established TV news stars in the Windy City, so he joined CBS as a staff announcer. With a wife and three kids to support, he did voice-overs for industrial films to augment his broadcasting pay. "Those were very intense years," he would recall in an interview. "I was afraid of the embarrassment of failing. I didn't want to flop in front of my family."

Dunphy received less than glowing reviews. "There was a time when I was getting into broadcasting, particularly in radio, that they were so voice-conscious, that... if you didn't have stentorian tones, you didn't get the job," he said. "Chicago was the hub of the great voices in radio and... voice was the big thing. When I was getting started, I wasn't considered to have the kind of voice that would probably make it on a network. That has changed. My delivery has gotten better, practicing at public expense. I used to deliver out of nervousness, a lot more rapidly. When you do that your voice is a little

higher and good for sports... I never had the big voice for radio way back then and had I stayed in radio I would probably have failed." Dunphy found work in television as the sportscaster on Chicago's top-rated Standard Oil News alongside Fahey Flynn, the WBBM anchor who was legendary for not writing a single word of his program. Dunphy would later be accused of the same journalistic shortcoming.

By 1960, Dunphy's former boss from Milwaukee was in Los Angeles auditioning anchors for the program that would become The Big News. "They were even looking at actors and people who couldn't write. They knew I had run a news department and they knew how *this* went," Dunphy remembered, illustrating his point in Ted Baxter-ish fashion with his fingers pounding an imaginary typewriter. He moved to Los Angeles to anchor a CBS regional 5 p.m. newscast and KNXT's 6 p.m. news for \$25,000 a year.

Like Putnam, Dunphy fattened his paycheck by changing stations, moving from KNXT to KABC's Eyewitness News in 1975. His name never appeared in the title of his broadcast, but he was known for his signature greeting. According to Dunphy, it grew out of a conversation with KNXT news director Sam Zelman about whether to have a standard opening for The Big News. "We came up with something I could be comfortable with and that he didn't think was too pretentious: 'From the desert to the sea to all of Southern California, good evening.'" Dunphy was surprised when his new employers at KABC wanted him to keep using the same old line: "Everybody must be tired of hearing that. It gets tiresome for me. I wouldn't mind not doing it, wouldn't miss it."

Of course, Dunphy wasn't the only newscaster with his own personal catchphrase. Like Cronkite intoning "... and that's the way it is," many local anchors saved their signature lines for the end of the program. For George Putnam it was, "And that's the up-

to-the-minute news. Up to the minute, that's all the news." For WTVJ's Ralph Renick in Miami, it was, "Good night and may the good news be yours." When Ted Baxter signed off with "Good night and good news," it was a parody of what viewers expected to hear.

Dunphy took pride in long workdays that took a toll on his family life. He claimed that he covered city hall with a film crew in the morning and then returned to KNXT to anchor the 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. newscasts. He boasted of reporting assignments that took him to the war-torn Middle East and the battlefields of Vietnam. He toured celebrity homes in a series called "Jerry Visits," and took a nostalgic trip to his ancestral home in Ireland. However, others behind the scenes of The Big News described some of Dunphy's adventures in the field as what might have happened if Ted Baxter had ventured outside the newsroom with a camera crew.

"No matter how many times (Dunphy) was told he was the best reader in the business, he wanted to prove to everyone that he was also one of the best journalists," said Joe Saltzman, a writer/producer at KNXT. He recalled Dunphy's attempt to interview movie star Jayne Mansfield. The film crew resented being bossed around by the anchor, but dutifully executed his orders to set up next to Mansfield's swimming pool. Dunphy rehearsed a scenario that would have the actress jump into the pool and swim across to the microphone to be interviewed. But when the camera rolled, Mansfield mistakenly grabbed the microphone instead of the pool railing. "Something went wrong, some kind of electrical shock," Saltzman said. Dunphy "shot up into the air and flopped into the water... Every agonizing second of the Talent and the Star's fight to get out of the pool was recorded for posterity. There was no story on the Six O'Clock News that night. And the Great Reader didn't want to go out into the field again."⁴⁰

Dunphy maintained that his workload was reduced because of health concerns. He also blamed union rules for discouraging his efforts to write more of the broadcast:

"The union system took away from the anchors the right to do what I always did: walk in, pick up the copy and say, 'I'll write this.' But no, somebody is covering this and that goes to this writer because (the story) was covered by this reporter and the writer, under the union rules, would have to edit the piece for this reporter. It finally came down to where anchors couldn't touch the copy... If you are discouraged over a period of years, you would do what I did and say the hell with it... Did they discourage us or have rules and regulations that isolated the anchors? They sure as hell did. And they got what they asked for, not as much production out of the anchors."⁴¹

In fairness to Dunphy, the increasing complexity of television newscasts in the 1960s made it virtually impossible for anchors to control the content. "The expanded format meant the end of the newscaster writing his entire broadcast," Nielsen noted of the period between 1965 and 1968 in Chicago.⁴² On the network level, even Cronkite rarely wrote his scripts and functioned as more of a managerial copy editor.⁴³ However, Dunphy did not help his own reputation by eagerly pounding out copy during a writers' strike at KABC and downplaying the contributions of those toiling behind the scenes.

Saltzman recalled that Dunphy told a newswriter, "You could be on the air if you got a nose job, did something about that complexion, got a new hairstyle, learned how to dress and took voice lessons." The anchorman went on to criticize a zoning story, telling the writer it didn't make sense. "Either shape up or we'll get someone else."

"We're trying to get out a newscast here," the writer replied. "Don't you have something to do?"

"Yeah, I have plenty to do," Dunphy retorted. "Without me, you're nothing. Without me you might as well go home. I'm the reason everybody tunes into the news. So who needs you? Without me you're just a piece of blank paper."

The writer, who produced Dunphy's 11 p.m. newscast on KNXT, plotted revenge. The next night, the writing staff was told to do nothing. The director of the broadcast was told to go to the control room and keep his mouth shut. At 10:15, Dunphy called the writer to ask for a script and was told to go f--- himself. According to Saltzman, the anchor became agitated as the minutes to airtime ticked by. He called the news director, who wasn't home. He called the general manager, who called the writer and demanded to know the whereabouts of Dunphy's 11 p.m. script. He got the same profane answer that Dunphy had received. The anchor stalked into the studio and threw the makeup man's powder puff across the room. At 10:59, Dunphy was on the set, pale and shaken. He had no script and was told the teleprompter was not working. He was about to go live in front of an audience of three million people. In Dunphy's words, he was "out there, naked."

Meanwhile, the writer had secretly produced the entire program ahead of time. The script had been hidden in his desk drawer. At the last minute he distributed copies to the technical crew but sent only one page out to the set for Dunphy. Saltzman recalled that the script was delivered to the anchor desk page by page "to the frantic talent who grabs the new page seconds before he finishes the page he is reading." Somehow, Dunphy got through the show and returned to the newsroom to find the offending producer with his feet propped up on his desk, enjoying a beer. "Nice job," he yelled to Dunphy. The next day, the anchorman called in sick.⁴⁴

Three months later, the news director remarked on how well Dunphy and the producer were getting along. "I've never seen such mutual respect in this business," the news director was heard to say. It could have been an episode of the Mary Tyler Moore Show, with its humorous tension between Ted Baxter and newswriter Murray Slaughter.

"The night Murray found out just how much money Ted Baxter was making was an episode that hit home," Saltzman wrote. "Ted Baxter epitomizes the worst of every anchorman and sums up verities about the business from the writer-producer's standpoint: anchormen can be irrational, stupid, silly, obstinate, ridiculous and get away with it. If a writer makes a mistake, no matter how minor, he is chewed out by everyone from the news director on down. He's only as good as his last paragraph."⁴⁵

Like Putnam, Dunphy played himself in movies and made headlines in his personal life. While driving his Rolls Royce, Dunphy and his then-fiancee were shot and wounded in what police called a botched robbery attempt in October 1983. "If I hadn't been able to afford a Rolls Royce then I would have been driving a less conspicuous car and the crumb-bums that did this maybe wouldn't have turned around and attacked us," Dunphy said. "Did my fame almost contribute to my demise? I was not shot because I was Jerry Dunphy. I looked like a fat cat in a fancy car that they anticipated robbing."

Dunphy insisted that news anchors should not seek celebrity status. "The business seems to have made us that. I think anchors wanting to start out to be stars because they are anchors wouldn't work that way," he declared. "Cronkite became a star news guy because he was star quality, a super excellent man who knew the news business and how to do it as well as anybody. If that made him a star, so be it. I thought he was just a damn good newsbody myself and can't help it if you're perceived that way." Dunphy perceived anchor stardom to be a function of corporate efforts to promote local and national news as a product. "I think the hype for Dan Rather when he was taking over for Cronkite was to make him a star. And he was just a damn good reporter who deserved the job. But did CBS not hype Dan Rather? You bet your butt they did."⁴⁶

Dunphy compared anchors like himself to one America's most beloved actors.

"You can't make yourself a star, no more than Jimmy Stewart would have been a star if somebody didn't promote him. I knew him when he was a fair to middling pilot on training missions in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and he used to get lost over the desert."⁴⁷

Management put up with Dunphy's ego because he was popular with viewers. Even his harshest critics could not deny his ability to communicate with the audience. "Working from a prepared script or from a hurriedly scribbled bulletin, there are few to equal him," Saltzman acknowledged. "As long as it was an affair between Dunphy and the written word, he was without peer."⁴⁸ An unidentified KNXT producer said of Dunphy, "A lot of people condemned him because he simply read other people's copy, but goddamnit, he was the best reader this city ever had. He was what every anonymous writer needs -- the best possible presentation your copy could get, life and believability breathed into your words."⁴⁹

Nobody ever said that about Ted Baxter.

Situation comedy vs. news reality

The Ted Baxter character created problems for the actor who became closely identified with the role. Knight complained to the producers, "I can't do this. I can't play this character, this stupid arrogant, ignorant man who is a laughingstock. It's just gotten into my soul... I'm identified with this person and I just don't want to do it anymore."

Realizing that "our biggest laughs come from him," Burns reassured the actor by comparing the role to the classic comedy of Jack Benny, who appeared to be cheap and conceited but was still popular with the audience. "Gradually, I think, (Knight) realized that people really loved the character."⁵⁰ But the real-life models for the role of Ted

Baxter didn't like it one bit, a reaction that surprised Burns. "I thought at the time George Putnam would not recognize himself in the character," he said.

"Early on, it offended both Jerry (Dunphy) and myself," Putnam told the Los Angeles Times. "Because when you're much younger you take yourself more seriously. Then you outgrow it and you don't give a damn. It was a hell of a cute character. And I've known a few (anchors) like that. Airheads."⁵¹

Local television news would ultimately embrace Dunphy, the objective news reader, and reject the opinionated commentator personified by Putnam, who fell from grace in the early 1970s. "I wore out my welcome," he acknowledged in an interview.⁵²

In 1971, Putnam presided over a confrontational hybrid of news and opinion called "Talk Back" on KTLA, an early experiment with interactive news. The hour-long newscast began with 30 minutes of traditional coverage read by Putnam, Fishman and Larry McCormick, one of the first African Americans to anchor in Los Angeles. Then in the second half-hour, the cameras would pivot to focus on a studio audience questioning the anchors and invited guests. A typical face-off pitted the Jewish Defense League against members of the American Nazi party. The nightly drama was popular at first, but when the novelty faded, so did the ratings. Paramount had sold KTLA to singing cowboy Gene Autry, who was persuaded to drop Putnam in favor of the less controversial Fishman. At Christmas in 1973, Putnam's contract was not renewed.

His fate was typical of TV news icons around the country being edged out by younger newsmen. But the entrenched anchors didn't give up without a fight. In Philadelphia, John Facenda dominated the news on WCAU, the CBS-owned station. Most Americans would recognize Facenda's voice on highlight films for the National

Football League. He rivaled KYW's Vince Leonard for ratings in Philadelphia. But in 1970, the ABC affiliate, WPVI, decided to compete by introducing a flashy new format called "Action News." Its temporary anchor was a young radio reporter from Miami named Larry Kane. In his memoirs, Kane recalled what happened when Facenda invited him to dinner: "Young man," said Facenda, our CBS station in St. Louis, KMOX, is looking for a five o'clock anchor and they are very interested in you. It would be a wonderful opportunity and I think you should fly out and talk to them."

Kane was flattered but later realized "that the great John Facenda's mission was really to get me out of town." Kane became the permanent anchor at WPVI. Two years later, Facenda lost his anchor position as WCAU changed its format to compete with the faster-paced Action News. "I still believe that was a gross mistake on the part of WCAU management," Kane said. "Facenda was loved; removing him guaranteed more than a decade of rating and financial losses at the station John Facenda had built."⁵³

Other stations paid the price when their elder statesmen defected to rival stations. Fahey Flynn was replaced at WBBM in Chicago by Bill Kurtis, a rising star from Kansas. Flynn joined WABC in 1968, becoming the cornerstone for the "Eyewitness News" team and taking the audience with him. Flynn's trademark bow tie "looks great on Channel 7," one admirer wrote to the station. "Long may it wave."⁵⁴ Flynn was a dominant figure in Chicago news ratings throughout the 1970s and died at age 67 in 1984.

In Los Angeles, Dunphy also defected to the "Eyewitness News" format in 1975. Former KNXT producer Gerald Ruben recounted how KABC general manager John Severino stole the CBS station's star by trash-talking during a tennis match with the general manager from Channel 2. Dunphy's contract was about to expire and Severino

voiced the opinion that The Big News veteran was too old for the marketplace. Dunphy was fired from KNXT and was drowning his sorrows at a local bar when the phone rang. It was Severino, calling with a lucrative offer to join Channel 7.⁵⁵ Eyewitness News would battle KNBC for number-one ratings for the rest of the century, while Channel 2 would struggle in vain to recapture the big numbers associated with Dunphy and The Big News. In 1989, he was paid \$1 million a year to anchor a three-hour prime time news block on Disney-owned independent KCAL. By the time he returned to KCBS in 1995, it was too late for even Dunphy to restore the glory days of The Big News. He returned to KCAL to read the 9 p.m. news.

"It's easy to make fun of Dunphy... the inspiration for Ted Baxter, the not-so-smart and all-too pompous anchor of the Mary Tyler Moore Show," observed Los Angeles Times columnist Bill Boyarsky. "He's had lots of career setbacks, but Dunphy's Irish face and thick white hair have been trademarks of L.A. TV news through the medium's many transformations and he's still an anchor. In short, Dunphy is a survivor..."⁵⁶

Putnam also survived, but without compromising his opinionated style. He co-hosted an Emmy-winning show with satirist Mort Sahl and continued his "often imitated, never duplicated, original Talk Back" program on a 20-thousand watt AM radio station, drawing a small but faithful audience for more than 25 years. Resentful over losing his TV status, he mourned what local newscasters had become. "No news reader is worth \$1 million on a local station," he said, complaining that successful anchors no longer must be able to write. "I would like to ask the average broadcaster today after he or she is finished broadcasting to repeat for me what he or she just said. Now there would be a

test! And I'll wager there isn't one in ten who has absorbed the material because they didn't write it, prepare it or report it."⁵⁷

In 1984, Knight hosted a KTTV tribute to George Putnam. In the tradition of a Hollywood celebrity roast, the newsman took a friendly ribbing from such entertainment legends as George Burns, Bob Hope and Sammy Davis Jr. Ed Asner told Putnam, "Some people used to say that the Ted Baxter character on the Mary Tyler Moore Show was based on you. That's ridiculous. Baxter was much better at reading the teleprompter." The audience howled as Knight rubbed his eyebrows, imitating Putnam, who responded with his own imitation of Ted Baxter. Later came a tape of Jerry Dunphy warning Putnam to "quit doing Ted Knight" because "he does our act."⁵⁸ All three men appeared to have come to terms with their shared public image. They were in on the joke.

Ted Baxter became "an indelible image in the public's mind of the pompous, perfectly groomed, know-nothing local news anchor," Saltzman observed.⁵⁹ The rest of the cast presented "some of the most positive images of journalists in the history of movies and television. These journalists are people we would like to spend a half hour with every week, people we would like to have over for dinner or a cup of coffee." The show represented a throwback to a simpler time in TV news when the producer's biggest problem was whether the anchorman would stumble over the copy. The stakes got much bigger when outside consultants and corporate strategists began meddling in local TV news content. The 1976 film "Network" was much more relevant to what was happening as real TV newsrooms adopted entertainment values. The ambitious programmer, played by Faye Dunaway, argues that an aging anchorman should become "the mad prophet of the airwaves" because "it looks like he may go over bigger than Mary Tyler Moore."

The situation comedy aired from 1970 to 1977, years when many real stations were promoting their warm and friendly news teams. Viewers had no trouble making the connection. Burns cited an episode called "The Good Time News" as an example: "Everybody was going into happy talk and they (the people at WJM) realized they couldn't possibly do it with a lummoX like Ted. They put him with a weatherman played by John Amos who had charisma and Ted got nervous. Of course, Ted was upstaged all the time. Mary had to come on to do an editorial because Lou didn't want to do it. And Ted tried to tell jokes. That's when Mary tells him to shut up. It was very funny." This plot was "an idea whose time had seemed to come in the early seventies and there was much supercilious discussion in the print media about the idiocy of hundreds of grinning and joking anchor men and women all over America."⁶⁰

The later years of the show reflected the rise of women and minorities with job promotions for Mary Richards and African-American weatherman Gordie Howard. Lou Grant and Murray Slaughter represented a generation of TV pioneers with roots in newspapers or radio, who were to be replaced by younger managers who grew up watching the news on television. The characters also felt the influence of hired consultants and a new management that fired everyone on the staff -- except Ted Baxter. The celebrity anchorman was the only survivor at WJM-TV when Mary Richards turned out the lights in the final episode. It symbolized the end of an era for local television news as a money-losing public service and the beginning of its transformation into an entertainment-driven profit center.

¹ Stan Chambers, *News at Ten: Fifty Years With Stan Chambers*, (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1994) p. 65.

² Barbara Matusow, *The Evening Stars*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983) p. 157.

³ Lynn Boyd Hinds, "Broadcasting the Local News: The Early Years of Pittsburgh's KDKA-TV,"

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- ⁴¹ Dunphy interview, op. cit.
⁴² Nielsen, pp. 212-213.
⁴³ Matusow, pp. 156-157.
⁴⁴ Saltzman, "Notes from a Survivor," pp. 2-5.
⁴⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁶ Dunphy interview, op.cit.
⁴⁷ Ibid.
⁴⁸ Saltzman, op.cit.
⁴⁹ Joe Saltzman, "KNXT Local News Pioneer," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 6, 1975.
⁵⁰ Alley and Brown, op. cit., p. 118.
⁵¹ Puig, op.cit.
⁵² Allen, op.cit.
⁵³ Larry Kane, *Larry Kane's Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, pp. 43-48.
⁵⁴ Clay Gowran, "Many Laud that Fahey Bow Tie," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1968. Section 2 page 23.
⁵⁵ Gerald Ruben interview with author.
⁵⁶ Bill Boyarsky, "The Question That Joined the Battle," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1991, p. B-2.
⁵⁷ Allen, op.cit.
⁵⁸ "George Putnam: Fifty Years in Broadcasting," op. cit.
⁵⁹ Saltzman, *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*, p. 123.
⁶⁰ Alley and Brown, op.cit. p. 119.

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Do Sweeps Really Affect A Local News Program?

An Analysis of KTVU Evening News During the 2001 May Sweeps

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Abstract

Do Sweeps Really Affect A Local News Program?

An Analysis of KTVU Evening News During the 2001 May Sweeps

An observation on the early evening news program of a local television station in California was conducted to examine whether a sweeps period increases the proportion of soft news. This study compared the weighted composition of soft and hard news before and during the 2001 May sweeps. The results show that the proportion of soft news did not increase during the sweeps as compared with before the sweeps, although it dominated the early evening news program. The results suggest that the commercial pressure imposed by sweeps does not always push a local news program in the direction of sensationalism of news program. The characteristics of a media market the station serves and journalistic tradition of the newsroom also matter.

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The inherent commercial characteristic of television has always imposed strong pressure on broadcasters to boost a viewership. The pressure becomes especially compelling during the sweeps - the rating periods in which size and demographical composition of audiences are measured, and advertising rates of the station for next several months are determined. One estimate indicates the loss of a single rating point during the sweeps can cost a large-market station as much as \$2 million (Vierria, 1994). This situation brings journalists into an ethical dilemma to deal with the commercial goal of the organization and the public interest at the same time. More often than not, the former seems to prevail

The sensitivity of TV organizations to sweeps is not limited to networks' prime-time programs. It also is the case for local television stations' news programs. At the local level, news programs account for a major portion of the station's revenue. Given a rating success depends on the performance of news, it is not surprising that during sweeps many local stations air multi-segment special reports and promotional materials

that highlight sensational and lurid topics. In a notorious case in Denver, for example, a dogfight was staged for the camera (Black, Steele, & Barney, 1993).

As people are getting more information about the issues of the day from local TV news rather than from their network counterparts, the implications of sensationalism in local TV news are enormous. In the analysis of Neilson Station Index data for the month of November from 1981 to 1988 for 29 television markets, Baldwin and his colleagues found that national news broadcast by CBS, ABC, and NBC combined reached about 47 million viewers nightly, while the combined viewership of local television newscasts reached about 80 million.¹

In its 2000 special report on 49 local TV stations' news programs, the Project for Excellence in Journalism— an initiative by journalists to enhance the standard of American journalism – lamented that lowering quality of local news programs is “driving out audiences from what was long the most popular and trusted source of information in the country.”²

Despite the pervasive reproach on declining quality of the local news programs during sweeps, however, some studies as well as anecdotal evidence suggest that commercial pressures of sweeps do not always prevail. The Project for Excellence in

Journalism also revealed that about 10 percent of the local stations under study earned best grades in terms of quality.³ Some large-market television newsrooms have been praised for airing sweeps series with quality, such as spousal abuse and political changes in Russia (Boedeker, 1994; Hammer, 1990; Rosenberg, 1989).

One explanation for the seemingly contradictory pictures seems to lie in differences in the quality of the media market. If the audience of a media market consists of highly educated audiences who expect news with quality, the local TV stations cannot afford to air obviously sleazier programs even during sweeps.

Another consideration is professional tradition in the newsroom. Although commercial imperative in television industry is strong enough to overwhelm other considerations, the tradition of journalistic excellence in a station would lessen the pressure imposed by sweeps.

This study was set up to ascertain the strength of such contradictory forces in a local news station by comparing the soft news proportion before and during sweeps. While starting with the hypothesis that sweeps would increase the proportion of sensational news – the soft news in this paper – the present study ultimately aimed at exploring the factors determining a local TV station's news program during sweeps.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted to analyze the commercial aspects of television programs. The television program production mechanism at work during sweeps was qualitatively analyzed by Moritz (1989). Based on his career in one of the network-owned stations in Chicago, Moritz focused on the production and promotion process of a two-part news series in May 1986 sweeps on foreign television. Most of the videotape for the series came from the network and edited to attract audience, while keeping production costs low. He concluded that the process by which news specials are produced during ratings periods at local stations “reveals television news in its worst light” (p.133).

Ehrlich (1995), on the other hand, examined whether journalists could take advantage of sweeps to serve both the market and the public interests. The author compared the sweeps series between a local station of the top-20 market and another of medium-size market, and interviewed the reporters who had produced the series as well as their supervisors. The author found that while it was possible for a reporter and news station to use sweeps to serve both the public interests and market interests, “this seems more likely to occur in markets with weak ratings competition” (p. 46).

Shidler and Lowery (1995) analyzed the prime-time network programs to explore the counter-programming strategy of ABC, Fox and NBC against CBS in 1992 February sweeps during which CBS carried exclusively the Winter Olympics. The authors based the study on their prior research on sexual behaviors on network TV programs and on-air TV promotions during a non-sweeps period, in which they had found that the networks presented sexual behaviors in the promotions at a rate more than 16 times higher per adjusted hour than in the programs. In their study on the counter-programming strategy during sweeps, however, the authors found that while there was always a certain amount of sexual content on prime-time network TV, sweeps did not cause the increase of sexual content except in Fox network.

The quantitative studies on local television news programs have produced rather inconsistent results. Kaniss (1991) conducted the content analysis on the three local news programs in Philadelphia for two weeks, including one week during sweeps in 1990. The author found that all three stations made similar news decisions in that regardless of its importance, the time for the coverage of government and policy is always balanced with time for crimes, accidents and fires. She also noticed that when government and policy is covered, the need to adopt a “sexy” or “humanistic” angle

frequently displaces important information. The author pointed that local advertisers' concerns with catching the largest audience lead to "a distortion of some news in favor of crimes, fires, accidents, and disasters"(p. 132). And she argued that by allocating vast resources to anchor salaries and investment in news technologies, "the news-seeking functions in local television stations are usually underfunded"(p. 132).

In a similar study in Cincinnati for three different years, however, Ryu (1982) suggested a different perspective. The author categorized the news contents into public affairs and sensationalism/human interest stories. The results show that while sensationalism/human interest stories serve as reserves to maintain high ratings, in 1976, the year of presidential election and in 1980 when American hostages were held in Teheran, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and several countries boycotted the Moscow Summer Olympics, local television news was abundant with stories concerning public affairs. Ryu concluded, "The most critical test of selecting news stories is not whether they belong to the public affairs or sensationalism/human interest stories, but their appeal to the audience's immediate concerns"(p. 78).

Despite the abundance of critical essays and news articles on sweeps and television programs, surprisingly few studies have been conducted to establish

empirically the relationship of sweeps with local news programs. The Project for Excellence in Journalism has been conducting one of the most extensive studies on the quality of local news programs every year since 1997. While the study provides invaluable reports on the quality of the local news programs across the country, it also does not explore the effect of sweeps in particular.

The scarcity of rigorous empirical studies in this area seems to stem from the extent to which many scholars take for granted that local stations are extremely vulnerable to advertising dollars. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) assert, "At profit-hungry local television news stations around the country, a look at coverage during ratings sweeps periods shows that producers are well aware of the economic payoff of sex and violence, which grab attention in news just as they do in prime-time entertainment shows" (p.146). The assumption in the TV industry that "where there are sweeps, there is sure to be sex"⁴ has turned into an assumption in communication discipline. The value of this study lies in the fact that it attempts to review this assumption in light of empirical data.

Background

With an estimated \$24 billion in advertisement revenue at stake in year 2001,

networks and their affiliate station have made their best efforts to increase the size of viewers, especially much coveted 18- to 49-year old demographics in each market.⁵

Nielson Media Research measures the viewership of networks and local stations in all 210 U.S. television markets three times a year - November, February, and May. Some industry insiders as well as communication scholars have raised doubts on the validity of sweeps ratings. Weiss (2001) noted, “the extraordinary programming and promotion efforts during sweeps throws off the validity of audience measurement for the rest of the year” (p.43).

The advertisement rate for network programs is based more on the year-long measurement of audience than sweeps. People meters, electronic set-top boxes that are placed in 5,000 homes around the country, enable the around-the-clock measurement of viewing rates and audience demographics of network shows. With the huge cost of expanding people meters to all local television markets, however, the sweeps periods influence heavily the local television stations. As one network executive aptly put it, “Most local stations live and die by the Nielson ratings of their local news.”⁶

This study was conducted based on the observation data of the early evening news (6 p.m.) of KTVU before and during May 2001 sweeps. KTVU is a Fox-affiliate

local station in Oakland, California. The Bay Area consisting of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose, is one of the most competitive media markets in the United States. The Nielson Designated Media Area (DMA) shows that the Bay Area is the fifth largest market with 2.4 million TV households.⁷ KTVU is ranked fourth, trailing the KGO, an ABC-affiliate, the KRON, an NBC-affiliate, and KPIX (at 6:30 p.m.) in the region.⁸

KTVU provided an optimal condition for testing the impact of sweeps on news contents. KTVU had every reason to try to improve its viewership during May 2001 sweeps because its rating in 2000 had decreased from the previous year.

On the other hand, KTVU also had a national reputation as one of the best local stations with quality news programs. Since 1997, the Project of Excellence has traced 49 local news programs in 15 major cities, analyzing the quality in terms of topic range, focus, enterprise, number of sources, viewpoints, and local relevance. KTVU earned the highest marks in the 2000 study and scored more than 100 points above the next-best station.⁹

The May 2001 sweeps period offered a good opportunity to test KTVU's response to the contradictory mandates, that is, journalistic excellence and commercial pressure.

Method

The May 2001 sweeps period began on April 26, and ended on May 21. The observation period covered from April 10 to May 17, during which the station cancelled five days of the news due to sports telecasts, such as Major League baseball or NBA. Over the observation period, the order, type of reporting, and topic of every news stories aired from Monday through Friday were analyzed except weather forecasts and sports summaries. The total number of news stories aired during the observation period amounted to 304 items – 160 stories for 11 days before the sweeps and 204 stories for 13 days during the sweeps.

This study traced the differences of two periods in terms of the weighted proportion of hard news in the total number of news stories aired. Weight was given to each story based on predetermined criteria, which were primarily designed to reflect the degree of importance of each story accorded by the news organization. That is, the station was monitored whether it treated the soft news more prominently during the sweeps compared to non-sweeps period. This coding scheme was designed to detect changes in judgment by a news organization concerning the selection and presentation of news.

Scoring

Each news story aired was rated on three characteristics.

- * *Topic*, the subject of the story
- * *Order*, the sequence of the story in terms of whether it was aired before the first or the second commercial break.
- * *Type*, reporting format in terms of live report, edited voice-over report, and anchor reading.

The order of each story reflects the organizational judgment of the station about the story. Just as a newspaper puts an article that it thinks is the most important on the front page, a TV station also airs the news story that it judges to be the most important as the lead story. The early evening news lasts 30 minutes including three to four commercial breaks. Three points was given to stories that were aired before the first commercial break, and two point to stories aired before the second commercial, and one point to all stories aired after the second commercial. The score based on the order of a story also has the advantage of overcoming the unfairness of equating a 3-minute story with a 30 second "brief." The observation data show that extensive coverage was usually aired before the first commercial break. Therefore, the score based on the order reflects not

only the importance but also the length of the story.

The format of reporting also matters. The allocation of limited resources is a good indicator of the importance of each story accorded by a station. If a station, for example, regards a mayoral election as important news, it is likely that it will send a reporter and satellite transmitter for a live report. If the station thinks that a news item is trivial, it would put the story on the anchor's reading list. Although the geographical distance has often worked as a constraint of live coverage by a local TV station, the emergence of video news providers and network affiliation has helped a local TV station to overcome such logistical difficulties. A local station can use video footage of the network or of video news providers. Stories received three points for a live report, two points for an edited report, and one point for a story read by the anchor.

For topic categorization, each story was categorized into hard news, soft news and "mixed" news. By definition, hard news includes a story concerning policy or broad social and political issues, while soft news includes events, or human interest that is presented without a broad social context. The first criterion of the categorization was the subject of each story, but special attention was paid on whether each story was presented with an episodic or thematic frame (Iyengar & Simon, 1994). The episodic

frame depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances or specific events – a homeless person, the bombing of an airliner, an attempted murder, and so on. The thematic news frame, in contrast, places public issues in some general or abstract context. Two stories with the same topic could be encoded into different categories. For instance, the report on the ongoing negotiation over the U.S. reconnaissance plane grounded in China was encoded as hard news, but the family reunion of the crew was encoded as soft news. Stories with multiple traits were put into a “mixed” category.

As the term “news” indicates, two big events broke out unexpectedly during the observation period, which might affect the comparison of the local news. They were the stories about the rolling blackouts in California and the delay of the Timothy McVeigh execution.

Before the sweeps, the stories concerning the power crisis in California constituted 16 items, which were also dealt with rather lightly, but the rolling blackouts that occurred in early May dominated the news for a while during the sweeps. This was also the case for the delay of McVeigh execution, which was announced on May 11. By and large, the stories concerning the power crisis were categorized as hard news, while the McVeigh case was classified as soft news. But the abrupt increase of certain topics

might bias the overall evaluation. To be fair, two separate analyses, one including those two topics (Data 1) and another without those topics (Data 2), were used and compared.

The hard news stories were given "+1," while the soft news stories "-1," and the mixed news "0." The distinction of plus and minus score was designed to contrast the hard and soft news distinctively. The weighted score of each story can be calculated by adding the score of order and type of the story and multiply the topic score. That is, the soft news (-1) aired as live report (+3) before the first commercial break (+3) got the worst score (-6), while the hard news presented in the same order and with the same reporting format got the best score (+6). Therefore, all stories could earn from -6 to +6 points. Adding the score of each story aired before and during sweeps weeks and comparing those two scores will show the trend of the proportion of weighted hard news. The higher the score, the more hard news the reports were.

Results

The hypothesis of this study was that given the broadcasters' sensitivity to viewing rates, the sweeps period would reduce the proportion of hard news, while increasing the proportion of soft news suitable for grabbing the viewers' attention. The observational results do not support the hypothesis. Using the data that included the

stories concerning the rolling blackouts in California and the McVeigh execution delay, the second column of Table 1 shows that the mean score of the hard news before the sweeps period was -1.02, while the score during the sweeps was -0.49. The one-way ANOVA analysis suggests that the improvement of news quality during sweeps is not statistically significant.

As the second column of Table 1 indicates, the data removing the stories concerning the rolling blackouts and McVeigh execution did not affect the results. The mean score of stories during the sweeps improved slightly compared to the stories before the sweeps but the difference is not statistically significant.

The data were analyzed in a different way. As described above, the order of each story is one of the important indicators that reflect the judgment of a news organization about the importance of each story. Therefore, it stands to reason that the station might treat the soft news importantly, airing those stories in the first part of the news during sweeps, even if they were not reported live. Controlling the reporting format, the change in the order of soft news is expected to reveal the trend. Table 2 shows that the modified measurement does not reveal any statistically significant change in the order of hard news aired between before and the during sweeps.

Altogether, the data consistently point to the fact that the early evening news of KTVU remained unchanged during May 2001 sweeps.

To further examine trends in coverage, the stories were compared across days of the week. Here, an interesting trend emerged. Figure 1 shows that the graphs based on two different types of data reveal that by and large, the hard news proportion decreased – in other words, soft news increased – on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and increased on Monday and Tuesday.

Discussion

How can a local TV station in the highly competitive media market remain unaffected by the sweeps period? The first answer that comes to mind is the uniqueness of the Bay Area media market. Bay Area audiences are highly educated and more affluent than any other area in the United States. According to the data of the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Bay Area's per capita income was \$34,634 as of 1997, which was second only to West Palm Beach, Florida. Other areas in the California lagged far behind the Bay Area.¹⁰ Santa Barbara ranked 17th with a per capita income of \$27,839, and Los Angeles was the 44th at \$25,313.

The educational level of the area is also one of the highest in the metropolitan

areas in the United States. The 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS) revealed that 37.3 percent of adults aged 25 and over in San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose area completed a bachelor's degree and more, next only to Denver-Boulder-Greeley, Colorado, 38.7 percent.¹¹ The national average was 26 percent. Audiences with a high level of income and education are presumed to pay attention to more sophisticated and less-sensationalistic news programs. Therefore, it is no wonder that in order to survive in the media market with highly educated audiences, a TV station needs to adopt a different strategy from the market with medium- or low-educated consumers. In the media market with highly educated audiences, sensationalistic news in an attempt to boost viewership would result in disaffecting an audience who expects quality news.

While sweeps may impose considerable restrictions on the journalistic performance of the TV reporters, it does not necessarily mean that the news during sweeps is uniformly transformed into sensationalism. Rather, the news is a complicated outcome that emerges from a dynamic in which numerous competing forces of differing strengths and directions are working together. Sweeps are a strong factor but not necessarily the strongest in determining the news. Other forces reduce the imperative of the sweeps, such as the characteristic of a media market, the nature of an event to be

reported, and journalistic standards of each news organization. For example, the rolling blackouts that occurred during the sweeps deserved extensive coverage regardless of the sweeps. The rolling blackouts were the typical hard news that touched on national energy policy. Although the way to present a story may depend on the journalistic standard of each station, even a sweeps period does not necessarily undervalue hard news that has a considerable newsworthiness. If a TV station allocates more time to soft news and downplays a big story that other channels play up, the station may end up losing the viewing rate it intended to boost.

The journalistic standards of a station also matter, which seems to be the case in the present study. The station is ranked the third in terms of market share and has every incentive to raise its viewing rate. The KTVU news director, Andrew Finlayson, explained:

“We are struggling with this (early evening news) program. We are finding a good quality program alone does not get you enough viewers. We feel a great amount of pressure during sweeps. But we hope it is to do the best job possible and not to stunt during this time. We have a few more resources during sweeps, and we hope

that shows up on the air and is a benefit to the viewer.”¹²

Indeed, the KTVU early evening news had covered the economic and business stories extensively over the observation period. Among those stories were the rising gas prices, which had been aired in the early evening news before it became prevalent in newspapers or other local news stations.

Of course, the station was not free from soft news. Over the observation period, stories originated from police or court dominated the airing time before the first commercial break. The observation data show that the station has extensively covered the eight-year-old girl kidnapping and sexual molestation by Curtis Anderson (Live report on April 23, 24, 25 30, and May 2) and seven-year-old girl kidnapping attempt (Live report on April 19, 26, May 2). As shown in Table 1, and 2, the average score remains a negative figure across the observation period. That means that soft news prevailed in the early evening news of KTVU.

The distinctive patterns that hard news proportion rises early in the week and decline later seem to result from the fact that newsworthy public affairs such as council meetings are usually scheduled early in the week. The increase of audience size in the

weekend might also contribute to the increase of the soft news proportion in the news programs.

The most obvious difference between the two periods was the appearance of teases during sweeps for 10 o'clock news – the prime time news. The teases were about 10 seconds in length but contained visually intriguing elements, such as fight between a tiger and a lion inside a cage or a dog mauling victim's videotapes. But an analysis of teases was not carried out because this study focused on the change in the weighted proportion of hard news based on the stories aired more than 10 seconds.

Conclusion

This study indicates that the news product in a local TV station is not mechanically defined by a single factor, that is, sweeps. As Finlayson explained, it is true that the sweeps exert an enormous pressure on TV newswriters. But the quality of a news program is shaped not only by the commercial pressures but also by the quality of the audience the station serves, the journalistic excellence the station maintains, and the characteristics of an event to be reported. The market pressure may be one of the strongest, but not the sole, determinant of the news product. The findings of this study suggest that the common assumption in the TV industry that, "where there are sweeps,

there is sure to be sex” seems to be overstated.

Of course, this study is not free from flaws. The longitudinal observation that this study relied on is suitable to track the change of a TV news program. But it has limitations in generalizing the result to different circumstances. The relative effects of sweeps, the composition of media market, and the journalistic standards of each news organization on news products deserve further research.

Notes

- ¹ Requote from McManus, J. H. (1994). *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p.10.
- ² Rosenstiel, T., Gottlieb, C., & Brady, L. A. (2000). Time of Peril for TV News. *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2000, 84.
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ Jarvis, J. (1992). Staking Out Sweeps: A Quick Preview of What's in Store During TV's Crucial Ratings Month, *TV Guide*, February, 10-11.
- ⁵ Weiss, M. J. (2001). Trying to clean up sweeps. *American Demographics*, Vol. 23(5), 43.
- ⁶ The Hottest TV News Controversies, *TV Guide*, Jan. 13, 1979, 9.
- ⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.nielsenmedia.com/FAQ/index.html/>
- ⁸ KTVU News Slumps in May Sweeps, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, May 27, 2000, p. B1.
- ⁹ Rosenstiel, T., Gottlieb, C., and Brady, L. (2000). *Ibid*.
- ¹⁰ Bay area income growth surpass the rest of the nation. *East Bay Business Times*, July 12, 1999. Retrieved from <http://eastbay.bcentral.com/eastbay/stories/1999/07/12/story7.html/>
- ¹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/p20-536/tab15.pdf>
- ¹² Andrew Finlayson (Personal communication, May 29, 2001)

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42-49.

Appendix

Table 1. Overall Score of News Quality

| Group | Mean score (Blackouts and McVeigh included) | Mean score (Blackouts and McVeigh excluded) |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Before the sweeps | -1.02 (N = 160) | -1.57 (N = 144) |
| During the Sweeps | -.49 (N = 204) | -1.07 (N = 169) |
| | <i>F</i> = 2.14 (<i>p</i> = .114) | <i>F</i> = 2.00 (<i>p</i> = .158) |

Note. Dep. Var: score=(order + type) x grade

Alpha is at .05

Table 2. Order of News

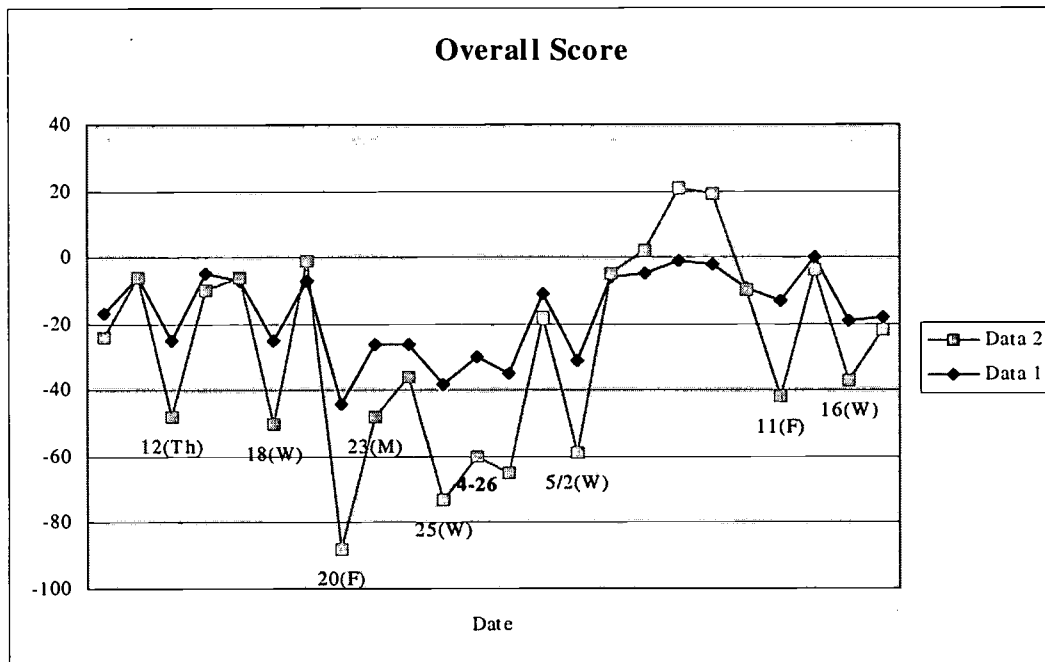
| Group | Mean score (Blackouts and McVeigh included) | Mean score (Blackouts and McVeigh excluded) |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Before the sweeps | -.50 (N = 160) | -.85 (N = 144) |
| During the sweeps | -.26 (N = 204) | -.59 (N = 169) |
| | <i>F</i> = 1.31 (<i>p</i> = .253) | <i>F</i> = 1.71 (<i>p</i> = .192) |

Note. Dep. Var: score = order x grade

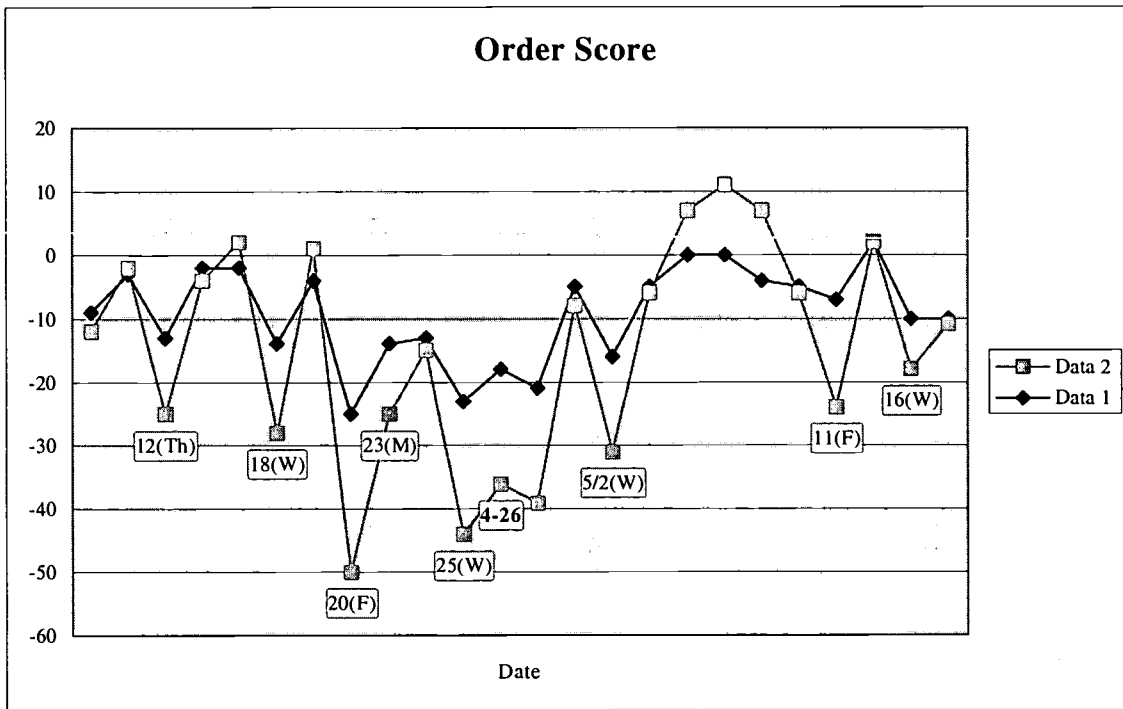
Alpha is at .05

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Figure1. The Daily Trend of the Proportion of Hard and Soft News



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STORIES IN DARK PLACES:
DAVID ISAY AND THE NEW RADIO DOCUMENTARY

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Running Head: Stories in Dark Places

STORIES IN DARK PLACES:

DAVID ISAY AND THE NEW RADIO DOCUMENTARY

ABSTRACT

David Isay is one of America's most honored broadcast journalists, although relatively few have heard of him. His radio documentaries have told of children growing up in violence-ridden housing projects, a former drug-addicted prostitute dying of AIDS, destitute men living in flophouses, and prisoners facing life sentences with no hope of parole. This article provides a critical/cultural analysis of Isay's radio stories within the context of contemporary scholarly critiques of American journalism. It explores three areas of inquiry: 1) Do Isay's stories about those outside the American mainstream appeal to social understanding or merely to voyeurism? 2) To what extent does Isay present an alternative model of journalistic storytelling, and what are the strengths and limitations of that model? 3) What are the implications of Isay's work for radio's future as a news medium?

STORIES IN DARK PLACES:

DAVID ISAY AND THE NEW RADIO DOCUMENTARY

The American radio documentary is in one observer's words 'undergoing a renaissance' (Johnson, 2001: 11). The new work provides 'a rich sense of character and detail' not 'heard in the majority of public radio news reports' (Smith, 2001: 6). It even has been credited with 'helping to spark a new approach to American journalism' (Fisher, 1999: 40). The increasing attention to radio documentary parallels a growing scholarly interest in the historical, political, and cultural aspects of U.S. radio (e.g., Hilmes and Loviglio, 2002). However, few scholars have focused directly on the new documentary and its implications for journalism.

This article helps fill that gap by examining the work of David Isay, who has been called 'the conscience and sizzle of radio storytelling' (Fisher, 1998: B1). He is one of the most honored journalists in any medium, having won three Peabody Awards, two Robert F. Kennedy Awards (including the Grand Prize for the first radio program ever to take that honor), the Prix Italia, and a MacArthur Fellowship 'genius grant' ('Radio Documentaries Take Listeners Into Dark Corners', 2001: 13). Still, relatively few have heard of Isay beyond regular listeners of National Public Radio, his primary outlet. That may be partly due to his devotion to finding 'the poetry in the stories of

those people who don't get magazine covers' and 'underdogs' in 'dark corners' of American society (Kirby, 2000: 4). His documentaries tell of a onetime drug-addicted prostitute dying of AIDS, destitute men living in flophouses, children growing up in violence-ridden housing projects, and prisoners serving life sentences with no hope of parole. Isay's voice has been almost completely absent from his pieces, another reason for his comparative anonymity: 'I learned to make myself disappear and let the people tell their own stories' (O'Neill, 2001).

Isay's goals and methods make his work particularly worthy of scholarly analysis. He has made a career of producing tales of those on society's margins. The stories have been told almost entirely through his subjects; in some cases, the subjects themselves have gathered almost all of the tape included in the pieces. Isay has chosen radio as his medium as opposed to print or video, and he has been able as an independent producer to reach a nationwide audience. As such, his work intersects with debates over journalism: the extent to which the news media can effectively explore matters of race and class, tell stories in new ways, and make room for voices outside the mainstream.

The article begins with an overview of Isay's stories and then establishes a qualitative framework to examine them within the context of how he created them and what he and others have said about them (Pauly, 1991). It also will study them within the

context of contemporary media criticism, linking scholarship on journalism with that on radio. Examples will be drawn from the stories to illuminate three areas of inquiry: 1) How well does Isay cover the 'dark places' that he has claimed as his beat? 2) To what extent does he present a different model of journalistic storytelling? 3) To what degree does he realize radio's potential as an alternative news medium? Ultimately, it will be argued that while his work has its limitations, it in many ways exemplifies the more socially-conscious and inclusive journalism that critics have advocated.

David Isay's Stories

Isay was not trained as a journalist. He received an psychology degree from New York University in 1987 and was planning to go to medical school when he saw a storefront 'Museum of Addiction' in the East Village. After he failed to interest local radio stations in the museum as a subject, he did the story himself in 1988 for a local Pacifica affiliate. An NPR producer heard and bought it, launching Isay's career (Freedman, 1998; Stewart, 2001a).

Isay's first major work for a nationwide audience was partly inspired by his discovery that his father was gay. 'Remembering Stonewall' (1989) was the first documentary in any medium to focus on the 1969 New York Stonewall Riots that helped launch the

gay liberation movement. The twenty-three minute documentary displayed what would become Isay's signature devices: it allowed subjects to introduce themselves (for example: 'My name is Randy Wicker; I was the first openly gay person to appear on radio in 1962'), juxtaposed contrasting points of view (with voices such as Wicker's heard alongside police who took part in the raid that triggered the riots), enhanced the mood through music (that of gay icon Judy Garland whose death immediately preceded the riots), made liberal use of natural sound, and barely featured Isay's voice. If it did not explicitly express its allegiances, it did so implicitly by concluding with a self-proclaimed 'thirty-eight-year-old drag queen' who pronounced: 'I'm not going to change for anybody. If I changed, then I feel that I'm losing what 1969 brought into my life, and that was to be totally free.' That was followed by Garland singing: 'How can I ever close the door and be the same as I was before?'

Isay then received a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to undertake the American Folklife Project, which sent him across the country to find stories of '[e]ccentrics, visionaries, dreamers, believers: men and women in pursuit of something, and holding onto that at all costs' (Isay and Wang, 1996: 11-12). He went to a small-town bell museum that was failing even though its owner had gone on food stamps to try to save it: 'I feel like the Lord intended me to share the beauty of

bells with others. I wish it could have been easier, but, gotta keep on' ('Brewer Bell Museum', 1992). He told of a man who had spent the past twenty years keeping a diary of everything he had ever done ('12:20-12:25: I stripped to my thermals') and who declared that to stop would be like 'turning off my life' ('Robert Shields, World's Longest Diary', 1994). Isay also visited a man who was building an entire castle by himself and was extremely unhappy about his lack of media attention: 'Conan O'Brien-where in the hell did he come from? . . . If they're so newsworthy, why ain't this newsworthy?' ('Jim Bishop, Castle Builder', 1994).

Isay reported on more somber subjects as well. In 'Tossing Away the Keys' (1990), he related the stories of inmates sentenced to life in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The piece employed another signature device: a subject (in this case, an inmate) served as narrator, introducing the story and linking the other prisoners' voices. Among them was Moreese Bickham (incarcerated since 1958), who was heard lovingly pruning what he called 'the beautifulest rosebush on the whole [prison] yard,' and Joe White (incarcerated since 1961), who tearfully recited a poem as gospel music played softly under him: 'I want to get to know just once more how it feels to be free/I want to rip and run, have a lot of fun, come go as I please.' The story helped lead to both men's release. White's sentence was commuted, and

Isay worked with a lawyer in producing evidence that Bickham, an African-American, had acted in self-defense in shooting two white men (Sack, 1995; Jordan, 2001).

If Isay used traditional investigative techniques in helping free Bickham (reviewing courtroom testimony and other documents), he employed more unorthodox methods in 'Ghetto Life 101' (1993). He had been invited to participate in the documentary series 'Chicago Matters' for public radio station WBEZ. Isay admired Alex Kotlowitz's There Are No Children Here (Kotlowitz, 1992), which told of two brothers growing up in a Chicago housing project. However, as Isay later wrote: 'Kotlowitz spent several years with his subjects. I had enough funding for about a week's worth of recording' (Jones, Newman, and Isay, 1997: 17). He gave tape recorders to two youths in the projects, thirteen-year-old LeAlan Jones and fourteen-year-old Lloyd Newman. They recorded their lives for seven days, communicating regularly with Isay but largely determining themselves what to capture on tape.

Jones suggested the title for the half-hour documentary that the two youths narrated and that aired on NPR's 'All Things Considered' in 1993. It featured Jones asking his mentally ill mother what had happened to his father (her answer: 'He probably dead') and Newman interviewing his alcoholic father (who was unable to spell 'food'). It also included sounds of the boys dropping rocks on cars from an overpass over Lake Shore Drive

('Mini-vans are one of our favorite targets,' said Newman).

'Ghetto Life 101' sparked controversy in Chicago and within NPR. An African-American reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times declared that the 'kids had been shamefully exploited' by Isay and that the piece perpetuated pathological stereotypes about African-Americans (Miner, 1993: 4). NPR reporter Phyllis Crockett, who had grown up in Jones's and Newman's neighborhood, called it 'irresponsible journalism at its worst' and 'a new low in which arrogant whites use unsuspecting blacks for preconceived notions.' Crockett and other members of NPR's minority caucus issued a memo saying they felt 'offended' and 'personally assailed.' Isay called the charges 'completely bizarre,' saying the piece was not about race but about children 'growing up in horrendous conditions' (Holsten, 1993: 5B).

Despite the criticism, 'Ghetto Life 101' won a raft of awards (the two youths, who also denied that any exploitation had occurred, shared in the prize money). The collaborators then rejoined for a sequel. In 1994, five-year-old Eric Morse was dropped to his death from the fourteenth floor of a building in Jones's and Newman's neighborhood. The culprits—who had been mad that Eric would not steal candy for them—were ten and eleven years old and became the youngest children in the nation ever sentenced to prison. Jones and Newman interviewed the chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority and the prosecutor and public

defenders in the case. They also spoke to the incarcerated father of one of the boys who dropped Eric as well as to Eric's mother and brother, the only media interview to which the mother consented. Isay punctuated the interviews and narration with music from jazz saxophonist Lee Morgan.

'Remorse: The 14 Stories of Eric Morse' (1996) won the Grand Prize from the Robert F. Kennedy Awards. It ended with Jones:

A lot of things that happen in this neighborhood are senseless. And I can't make too much sense out of the death of Eric Morse. All I can do is hope: hope that the silencing of this one five-year-old child might get people to listen a little more closely to the rest of our voices, and understand a little more about the realities we face everyday. There's plenty of remorse to go around in our neighborhood, plenty of tragedy to consider. But we try not to think about it too much. . . . We just keep looking forward, going about our business as best we can. It's how we survive.

Perseverance in the face of remorse and tragedy has continually been a theme of Isay's work. 'All the Way Broken' (1995) told of Iolene Catalano, an ex-prostitute and heroin addict whom Isay persuaded to record her life story. She spoke of her father molesting her when she was five and of being taken away from her mother and put in an orphanage (the mother, herself

a drug addict, committed suicide). Before Catalano could complete her story, she entered the hospital with complications from AIDS. There she kept an audio diary with a tape recorder by her bed. 'Now my death is sitting right on me now; it ain't gonna be much longer,' she said shortly before she died. 'But it's okay. I'm finished. It's over, and I came out of it as a real human being, and that's all I could ever ask for.'

'The Sunshine Hotel' (1998) took listeners inside a New York City flophouse and introduced them to the denizens: Paul, 'the only deaf-mute crack addict on the Bowery'; 425-pound 'Fat Anthony,' able to polish off a twenty-six-ounce can of ravioli in one sitting; eighty-year-old Mr Marshall, stricken with senility and living in his own filth. The hotel manager served as narrator: 'The Sunshine is the last stop. On the one hand, it's probably as close as you can come to living in hell. . . . On the other hand, it's pretty interesting.'

Isay formed his own non-profit production company, Sound Portraits, in 1994. It put documentaries such as 'Ghetto Life 101' into classrooms across the country and developed programs to train young people, including juvenile offenders, to produce their own stories. At the same time, Isay continued to collaborate with colleagues such as Stacy Abramson on documentaries. 'Witness to an Execution' (2000) in many ways represented the flip side of 'Tossing Away the Keys.' Rather than

inmates, it featured prison officials, chaplains, and journalists who witnessed the executions regularly carried out on Texas's death row. The piece ran slightly more than twenty minutes, about the time needed to perform an actual execution. To a muted acoustic guitar accompaniment, the witnesses described how an inmate was strapped down and spoke his final words before the lethal chemicals were injected. They also described family members' reactions: 'You'll never hear another sound like a mother wailing whenever she is watching her son be executed.' The documentary ended with the prison warden, who served as narrator: 'There are times when I'm standing there, watching those fluids start to flow, and wonder whether what we're doing here is right. It's something I'll be thinking about for the rest of my life.'

Isay's MacArthur grant in 2000 allowed Sound Portraits to break even for the first time. He thus was able to spend less time and energy on fundraising and more on producing documentaries. 'I do stories about people that I like, who are for the most part probably either ignored or misunderstood or not thought about,' he said. 'It's just about introducing people to people. And again it's corny, but just seeing that everybody is sort of the same' ('Radio Documentaries', 2001: 14).

Interpretive Approach

Isay's work will be examined here from a critical/cultural

perspective that views news as a form of storytelling shaped by its social, cultural, and historical context. As Parisi (1998: 239-240) puts it, 'journalistic texts are literary constructions that are yet profoundly aligned with viewpoints and values of particular social and economic interests.'

Scholars have used such an approach to study specific publications, programs, or genres of news. Parisi (1998) examines a three-part series on Harlem in the New York Times and argues that even though an African-American reported and wrote it, it still reproduced negative stereotypes. Lule (2001) says the Times regularly tells stories rooted in such ancient myths as the 'Hero,' the 'Scapegoat,' the 'Flood,' and the 'Good Mother.' Such mythic retellings tend to reproduce the existing social order. Campbell (1991) argues that the television news magazine 60 Minutes portrays its reporters as detectives, analysts, and tourists who tell stories reaffirming the commonsensical, individualist values of 'Middle America.' Ettema and Glasser (1998) combine close readings of investigative news stories with interviews of the journalists who wrote them. The authors argue that such stories are heavily suffused in an irony that paradoxically may inhibit the moral outrage the journalists hope to arouse through their reporting.

Pauly (1991) presents a framework for such qualitative media studies that focuses on product (what stories the media tell),

practice (how the media create those stories), and commentary (what the stories say about us and how we in turn respond). That is, the news itself can be examined within the context of how particular journalists or news organizations select, report, write, and disseminate it as well as what journalists and others think it says about our present condition.

In Isay's case, his product—the stories he has told—are readily available on the Internet (www.soundportraits.org) as well as on CD and cassette; expanded versions of some of his stories also appear in book form (Isay and Wang, 1995; Jones, Newman, and Isay, 1997; Isay, Abramson, and Wang, 2000). In terms of practice, Isay has talked extensively about his storytelling methods and philosophy in his books as well as in interviews and panel discussions; those have been collected and drawn upon here. The same sources have been used to garner Isay's own commentary on his work alongside that offered by others.

The goal is not to perform a comprehensive content analysis of Isay's stories but to develop critical insight into how his work contributes to the debates over journalism outlined at the start. His documentaries provide examples that may confirm much of what critics say is wrong with American journalism and yet also serve as a model for change.

Covering Race and Class

Critics argue that the news does a poor job of covering race, class, and other social divisions. They say increasing concentration of ownership has steered the media toward serving the interests of the powerful, monied few (McChesney, 1999). According to Bagdikian (2000: 216), news issues 'are more likely to be pursued in depth if they portray flaws in the public, tax-supported sector of American life, and less likely to be pursued if they portray flaws in the private corporate sector.' Thus, stories about problems in welfare or other government programs for the poor are more prevalent than those about corporate tax breaks or bailouts. Financial pressures also encourage news that disproportionately focuses on violence in minority communities (Entman and Rojecki, 2000: 78-93). Even stories that seem more substantive may do little to encourage change or may tend toward stereotype. They only 'hold up injustice as a spectacle' (Christians, Ferre, and Fackler, 1993: 113), or according to Parisi (1998: 242-244), treat their human subjects 'as objects, who embody social problems, rather than subjects and centers of consciousness.' They sentimentally show the poor as having 'hopes' and 'dreams' while implying that those hopes never will be realized due to 'weakness of character and moral inadequacy.'

Isay's stories can be criticized on some of the same grounds. As already noted, African-American journalists objected

strongly to what they said were negative stereotypes in 'Ghetto Life 101.' One of the youths' fathers was absent and presumed dead; the other was alcoholic. Jones's sister was an unwed mother at fifteen and had turned to alcohol and drugs herself. Newman's nineteen-year-old sister supported her four brothers and two sisters in a roach-infested housing project on a \$500 monthly welfare check. The story frequently referred to the neighborhood's gang violence (Jones compared it to Vietnam) and featured the youths dropping rocks on cars. NPR's Phyllis Crockett branded the documentary part of the "tourist in the ghetto" genre' that provided little insight into how inner city African-Americans really lived or how youths such as Newman and Jones managed to grow up as 'intelligent, articulate, basically good, likable kids' (Wilner, 1993: 14).

The same sorts of charges can be directed at other Isay stories. In 'Tossing Away the Keys,' African-American inmates bemoan their fate as the prison's gospel choir sings mournfully in the background. In 'The Sunshine Hotel,' grossly obese or otherwise freakish men while away their days inside tiny cubicles topped with chicken wire, seemingly unable or unwilling to earn a living. In 'All the Way Broken,' a woman reflects profanely on her miserable past as an addict and prostitute before she finally succumbs to AIDS. To a degree, all those stories can be seen as perpetuating stereotypes. One critic also took exception to the

American Folklife Project stories about eccentric diary-keepers and castle-builders: 'Isay has a tendency to smirk behind his hand ever so slightly at his tribe, and that is a grave sin indeed' (Loohauis, 1995: 12).

From such a perspective, Isay does not present substantive reports on racial and class inequities. He may be accused of offering either a voyeuristic spectacle to shock and amuse affluent public radio listeners or sentimental sops to their liberal pieties. Even if the latter is true, the stories still may fall on deaf ears. 'I don't tune in your show to be made to understand and be sympathetic to hookers,' one listener e-mailed NPR following the broadcast of 'All the Way Broken.' 'I tune in to be informed of the events taking place in the world' (National Public Radio, 1995).

On the other hand, such reactions are not necessarily characteristic of the entire audience. 'I thought I was in for some emotional manipulation,' wrote another listener concerning Iolene Catalano's story. 'I was riveted by the strength and intelligence in Iolene's voice, her candor, her sense of herself, and by her artful command of both the spoken and written word' (National Public Radio, 1995). Such a reaction indicates that Isay actually confounded stereotypical expectations; the listener was surprised to hear such a woman being articulate and eloquent. Media ethicists (e.g., Black, Steele, and Barney, 1999) argue

that journalists must give voice to the voiceless, and Isay lists that as a key goal: '[I]t's as much as possible trying to be the vehicle through which people can tell their stories . . . in a way that they feel is true' ('Radio Documentaries', 2001: 14-15). He adds: 'Most people are happy to tell their stories if they feel safe with the person they're telling them to. It's a matter of trust and honesty. Everyone in the world wants to be known and recognized for what they have done' (Stewart, 2001a: 23). Indeed, the castle-builder showed his displeasure that it had taken so long for someone to interview him.

There also is enterprise, humor, and fellowship among Isay's subjects. In 'Tossing Away the Keys,' a death row inmate educates himself from books smuggled to him by the guards and becomes editor of the prison newspaper; other inmates form a 'Lifers' Association' aimed at 'the improvement of ourselves and society.' In 'The Sunshine Hotel,' 'Fat Anthony' declares that the hotel has become 'too much like home' for him to want to leave: 'You been in a place such a long time, people get to be like family.' In 'Ghetto Life 101,' Jones and Newman enter a downtown hotel to finagle an interview with a professional basketball player. They reflect jovially on the comparative advantages of rubber versus plastic noses. Jones persuades his grandmother to sing her favorite hymn: 'She was hoarse, but she still can blow,' he says approvingly. He also declares: 'I don't know why some kids just

give up hope, and others—like me and Lloyd—hold on. Maybe it's just that both me and Lloyd have at least one strong person in our families to watch over us.'

In such ways, Isay's stories serve as exemplars of what Parisi (1998: 249) says stories about the urban poor should include: 'the idea that poverty engenders cooperation and mutual coping strategies.' One observer even has praised Isay for avoiding 'the self-admiring phoniness of today's mannered urban journalism' (Stewart, 2001b: 25). While creating 'Remorse,' the sequel to 'Ghetto Life 101,' Isay and the NPR producers he worked with allowed several people (including some who had criticized the earlier documentary) to listen to the raw tape and make suggestions before the new documentary aired (Conciatore, 1996). Media ethicists say such dialogues are also essential to quality journalism (Black, Steele and Barney, 1999).

Telling Stories Differently

Critics charge that the predominant models of journalistic storytelling are sorely lacking. Bennett (1996: 37-76) writes of four 'information biases': news that is personalized (focusing heavily on individuals as opposed to institutions), dramatized (concentrating on dramatic personalities and conflict), fragmented (providing little political context to daily happenings), and normalized (emphasizing the reassuring and the

routine at the expense of a more searching examination of troubling issues). Scholars also criticize the professional code of objectivity. In the words of Rosen (1999: 216): 'What is insidious and crippling about objectivity is when journalists say: "We just present you with the facts. We don't make judgments. We don't have any values ourselves." That is dangerous and wrongheaded.' Ettema and Glasser (1998) say objectivity can undermine the moral engagement of both journalists and citizens with the news, even the powerful stories of systemic breakdown and social injustice that the best investigative journalism tells.

Again, Isay's stories can be subjected to many of the same criticisms. He has praised radio for being 'great for telling intimate, emotional stories' ('Open Mics', 2001)-i.e., those that are personalized and dramatized. Thus did he say that 'Ghetto Life 101' was not about race but about two boys (who presumably could have been of any color) growing up in difficult circumstances. As one observer has noted, that is typical of Isay's subjects: 'Their personas may be precarious, their environments unfortunate or hostile, but they manage to plug along gallantly, with resources barely adequate for making a life' (Stewart, 2001b: 24). However, such emotional tales of individual perseverance do not systematically examine why the individuals have so few resources or what can or should be done

to redress their plight.

That is especially true given that Isay imposes a 'no expert rule': although he says he researches his stories more thoroughly than most journalists do, public officials, academics, and advocates discussing policy choices do not appear in his pieces (Jordan, 2001: Y1). That can contribute to their sense of fragmentation and being disassociated from a broader political context. 'Ghetto Life 101' and 'Remorse' do not dwell on questions of youth violence, inadequate public housing, or institutionalized racism; 'The Sunshine Hotel' does not ponder issues of homelessness or care for the mentally ill.

The 'no expert' rule also means that for the most part, no one is held directly accountable for the conditions in which Isay's subjects live (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 193-197). One exception is 'Remorse,' in which Jones and Newman allow project tenants to confront the housing authority chairman face to face. 'This is not a fitting place for a human being to live,' one tenant tells the chairman. Jones and Newman then interview a twelve-year-old boy who tells them that he wants to live 'anywhere except around here.' However, the boy only can manage a shy 'hi' to the chairman, which triggers laughter and defuses the impact of the previous confrontation.

While Isay did work to help free one of the inmates profiled in 'Tossing Away the Keys,' he has kept his opinions out of his

pieces as rigorously as he has kept out his voice. Regarding his views on capital punishment, the subject of 'Witness to an Execution,' he would only say: 'They're not germane' (Janssen, 2001: A26). As for flophouses such as the Sunshine Hotel, he stated simply: 'We don't have a social agenda to suggest that they shouldn't exist or should' (Richardson, 2000: B3). In effect, he adheres to the same professional norms of objectivity that many have criticized. Not only do his stories not point toward solutions to social problems, they sometimes imply that no solutions exist. Calling the murder of a five-year-old 'senseless' eschews the appeal to collective conscience and morality that may be necessary to redeem public cynicism and effect meaningful change (Ettema and Glasser, 1998).

However, just as Isay's first full-length documentary 'Remembering Stonewall' implicitly expressed its sympathies regarding gay rights, so have other stories implied that things are not as they should be. 'Tossing Away the Keys' speaks of Louisiana's system of denying any chance of parole for those serving life sentences. A former state prison warden says bluntly: 'I feel that what's going on now [in Louisiana] is wrong. You have to give an inmate hope. When he's lost hope, he's lost everything.' In 'The Sunshine Hotel,' the hotel manager pronounces it 'a stunningly sad place to live.' 'Witness to an Execution' concludes with the warden's admission that he wonders

whether putting people to death is the right thing to do. After declaring Eric Morse's death 'senseless' in 'Remorse,' LeAlan Jones goes on to say he hopes it at least will force others 'to listen a little more closely to the rest of our voices.'

That may be Isay's most significant contribution: not to call for reform but simply to give others a voice. To speak of Isay's 'subjects' is something of a misnomer, since they regularly collaborate with him in creating and narrating the pieces. LeAlan Jones wrote his own soliloquy at the end of 'Remorse' (Jones, Newman, and Isay, 1997). That is not to say Isay surrenders control over the final product. He is obsessive in conducting research and interviews and shaping a story to his exact specifications even though he is never heard in it, prompting one observer to say Isay is 'both determinedly absent and fiercely present' in his work (Freedman, 1998: 1).

In immersing himself in stories and producing carefully crafted tales of others' lives, Isay has declared a kinship to literary journalists and documentary film makers who do the same thing ('Radio Documentaries', 2001). At its best, such reporting is 'pluralistic, pro-individual, anti-cant, and anti-elite' (Kramer, 1995: 34). It may not cure the world's ills, but it offers a storytelling model that enhances citizens' shared sense of themselves.

Radio as Alternative

Contemporary American radio might seem an unlikely place to search for anything outside the mainstream. Critics point to it as an especially egregious example of corporate conglomeration and homogenization, charging that public radio is becoming indistinguishable from its commercial counterpart (Ledbetter, 1997; McChesney, 1999). Some call for an independent and politically more progressive alternative to the existing public broadcasting system (Barsamian, 2001).

Isay does not serve as that alternative. It is true that he is an independent producer who occasionally has clashed with National Public Radio and once set up an ad hoc network of stations to air audio tapes of executions after NPR refused to do so (Freedman, 1998; Janssen, 2001). However, he has publicly rejected the notion that radio is or should be a more 'progressive' medium, consistent with his philosophy of avoiding discussions of policy choices or taking explicit stands on issues ('Open Mics', 2001). Whereas Barsamian (2001: 47) charges that 'anything remotely progressive has little chance of getting on' NPR, Isay enjoys a level of access and funding that the vast majority of independents do not.

However, Isay and other new radio documentarians may offer another sort of alternative: a different way of creating a shared sense of ourselves. Douglas (1999a: 23-24) says radio is

particularly good at forging 'imagined communities.' She borrows the phrase from Anderson (1983), who asserts that the newspaper helped build nations by giving individual readers a sense of common identity and purpose. Douglas (1999b: A37) argues that radio played a similar role in making 'us feel a part of this culture we call "America",' adding that radio was an even more potent community-building medium than the newspaper:

It wasn't just the experience of hearing the same thing at the same time that tied people together. What also united them was that millions were engaged, simultaneously, in the same cognitive and emotional work: to create a mental representation of a speaker, a news event, a story. This understanding, that so many of your fellow Americans were constructing similar, but distinct mental images right along with you was crucial to radio's special ability to produce imagined communities.

Radio documentarians suggest that the medium can accomplish the same thing today. Isay is acutely conscious of the 'middle class [and] upper middle class' listeners NPR reaches. He tries to expose them to places and people they never have seen or met, not through confrontation but stealth: 'My goal always is to kind of sneak behind people and almost like quietly lift them up into this story. And I try to carry them for twenty-two minutes without them even knowing it' ('Radio Documentaries', 2001: 14).

Another independent producer, Jay Allison (2001: 16), also praises radio's power to lure listeners into hearing tales of those unlike themselves: 'Lacking earlids, we are defenseless, vulnerable to ambush. . . . Invisibility is our friend. Prejudice is suspended while the listener is blind, only listening.'

Scholars and critics, particularly those who study or advocate public journalism (e.g., Glasser, 1999; Rosen, 1999), are keenly interested in the news media's power to promote civic life and build communities. Pauly (1999: 149) says the key to making democracy work may not be forming the focus groups and forums that public journalists advocate, but instead 'acknowledging social life as we find it, giving groups the means and access to tell their own stories, and forswearing some traditional privileges of professionalism in the name of solidarity and empathy.' Ettema and Glasser (1998: 200-201) similarly declare that solidarity is the 'most urgent' value that journalism should embrace as part of a broader 'call for insight into difference-whether among neighbors or nations-and a search for common ground.'

In that regard, Isay's distribution of tape recorders to his subjects and his insistence on removing his voice to make room for others may be a prescient strategy. At a time when Douglas (1999b: A37) says American 'radio has become powerfully re-segregated by age, race and gender' into 'mutually exclusive

auditory niches,' Isay uses the medium to let people tell and hear stories from places that otherwise would be dark and silent. Such stories give insight not only into difference—allowing NPR's listeners to hear from African-American children or from men and women who preserve dignity in the midst of squalor—but also commonality: the notion that, as Isay puts it, we are all pretty much the same.

As such, the new radio documentary deserves continued scholarly attention. While not many currently support themselves producing radio documentaries, the cost of creating a professional-sounding piece is much lower than that of a video documentary; it can be recorded with relatively inexpensive equipment and edited with free software on a home computer. Prisoners, teens, and others have begun producing their own stories, and the Internet allows not only their easy distribution but grants them a permanence that radio work has not enjoyed until now. It also provides a forum for exchanging advice and ideas concerning radio production. An annual international audio festival has been established to serve the same purpose. Some of the new work has a more investigative or political edge than Isay's (Smith, 2001; 'Radio Documentaries', 2001; Allison, 2001; 'Open Mics', 2001; Johnson, 2001).

Isay welcomes the entrants into his field: '[T]he dream is a lot of people start picking up tape recorders and interviewing

people and playing around and adding music, and doing all kinds of cool stuff' ('Open Mics': 15). Such a dream parallels that of Douglas (1999a: 357), who hopes that 'some defiant rebels, old or young or both' will 'cultivate new modes of listening and new discourses' to help counter 'the often top-down meanings of the media.' If they succeed, American journalism-and democracy-will be the better for it.

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**TELEVISION BREAKING NEWS & THE INVALID APPLICATION OF A
UTILITARIAN JUSTIFICATION: A Practical Plan for Consequential Ethical Dialogue
BEFORE Breaking News Occurs**

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TELEVISION BREAKING NEWS & THE INVALID APPLICATION OF A UTILITARIAN JUSTIFICATION: A Practical Plan for Consequential Ethical Dialogue BEFORE Breaking News Occurs

Introduction

Television breaking news situations leave little time for ethical discussions. The events of September 19, 1999 in Littleton, Colorado and of September 11, 2001 in New York City are testaments to this fact. The rush to get information on the air supersedes any pauses to evaluate the ethical ramifications of covering a story. The proliferation of technology and competition over the past decade has led to a dramatic increase in the airing of live breaking news events. When tragedies occur, for example the 1999 plane crash of John F. Kennedy, Jr., continuous, breaking news coverage is expected and significantly boosts ratings (Katz, 1999). The coverage of the aforementioned events received significant criticism on a number of ethical levels. But in these situations, it is generally accepted among journalists “that the public’s right to know provides the moral basis” for the journalist’s freedom to publicize information. (Gauthier, 1999, pg. 197). I believe however that this basic Utilitarianism argument becomes invalid when applied to breaking news.

The study of television breaking news is a generally untapped scholarly area. The process of covering breaking news has been studied (Berkowitz, 1992) and criticisms of breaking news coverage after the fact are common in trade and industry publications. However, few scholarly studies exist that examine the breaking news product and its

speculated effects. It is important then to study this genre because of its proliferation, the importance placed on it as an audience builder and the ethical ramifications.

Unlike breaking news, there is vast literature on Utilitarianism and its application to journalism. The people's right to know is a common justification used by journalists to defend their actions or news product. But Utilitarianism as articulated by British philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stewart Mill relies heavily on consequentialism. Consequences of breaking news coverage are rarely considered in TV news primarily due to time restraints. Utilitarianism holds that it must if the principle is to be used as a justification. In newsrooms around the country, the weighing of pros and cons before airing certain stories or pictures often does not take place. The emphasis is on distributing the information quickly. Therefore utilitarianism cannot be used as a blanket argument in defense of actions and news product. Again, the Utilitarian justification for news, either print or broadcast, is nothing new. But the application of it to breaking news, at a time when the genre is expanding, salient and emphasized by news organizations, is new and necessary.

The presentation order of this paper is not traditionally academic. Television breaking news in 2002 is also untraditional and deserves unique approaches to its study. It will begin first with a plan of action. When faced with mounting pressures from various factors, it is improbable and impossible to expect news organizations to take the time necessary to evaluate the situations ethically. Because there is no time as breaking news is happening, the discussions must take place beforehand. What I am proposing is a practical approach that allows for ethical discussions to take place before the news breaks. The purpose of this article then is two-fold: 1.) to unveil a practical plan for

opening up the ethical, consequential dialogue before newswriters find themselves in the midst of such situations, and 2.) to show how illegitimate the utilitarian justification is in breaking news situations. Following the presentation of the plan, I will develop this philosophical rationale delving into journalists' invalid application of utilitarianism.

A Proposed Plan for Ethical Discussions Before News Breaks

“Policy tends to be unwritten and informal, accessible to newswriters only through organizational socialization--except for formal written policies concerning non-routine occurrences that news organizations tend to adopt after experiencing major news events, such as serious accidents and natural disasters”

- Kueneman & Wright, 1975, In Ettema, Whitney, & Wackman

When a news story breaks, newsrooms go into crisis mode. The emphasis is on the here and not, not the future. In reality, there is no time for ethical discussion of consequences in a breaking news situation. When faced with mounting competitive pressure to get the information on the air first, it is improbable and almost ludicrous to expect news organizations to take the time necessary to evaluate ethical possibilities. Because there is no time as the event is unfolding, the discussions must take place **BEFOREHAND**. What I am proposing is a practical approach that allows for ethical discussions to take place before the news breaks. I propose each station create an individual, written guide to help their employees faced with ethical decisions. This is not a book containing plans of action, for example who to call and where to go if a plane crashes, but a practical ethical playbook to help newswriters create a game plan when a sensitive situations arises. It may not include all the possible scenarios and consequences, but it will provide journalists with a firm foundation, based on a station's news philosophy.

The first thing to include is the station's basic news philosophy. It needs to be articulated for all newsroom employees to read, a tangible reference source. This may seem simplistic, but in in-depth interviews with 16 TV newswriters at 4 different stations in the Dallas-Fort Worth market, many expressed a news philosophy that was in contrast to how they actually responded to a breaking news event, in this case a shooting in a church (Miller, 2000). A tangible, in print philosophical mission statement may help newswriters evaluate and deal with ethical dilemmas.

Second, basic station policies also need to be put in print. For example, the station's policy on airing unedited video, reporting unconfirmed information, i.e., scanner chatter, using unnamed sources and using live video that includes excessive blood, police tactical positions, hostage situations, suicides, unpredictable people as news subjects, and so on. Many stations rely on a case-by-case verbal policy. However, news managers often are not available for counsel. In addition, waiting for a decision on an issue that could have been resolved beforehand and written down seems counterproductive.

The most important part of this playbook would be the creation of hypothetical breaking news scenarios. They would include unexpected outcomes for common and uncommon breaking news situations. The chosen outcomes will help set philosophical policies that let reporters, producers, editors, etc. know where the station stands and what actions the station sanctions. Such scenarios would include school shootings, high-speed chases, plane crashes, hostage situations, suicide threats and so on. While all breaking news situations are going to be unique, the cases would include obvious and unpredictable long and short-term consequences and possible solutions when faced with different choices in similar circumstances. These scenarios are not to be unrealistically

read in the car on the way to cover the breaking news event. Again, they are to be internalized before such situations arise.

Finally, after each significant breaking news event has passed, all the newswriters should meet and have an ethical evaluation of what they did right, what they did wrong and what they could have done better. The event then becomes a case study. Copies will be made and distributed for all employees to read and put in their playbooks. Journalistic ethics are constantly having to be refined as different aspects of the business evolve. Although mistakes were made in the coverage of Columbine, many media critics agreed it was much better than that of previous school shootings such as Jonesboro, Arkansas and Pearl, Mississippi (Pompilio, 1999). Experience is an excellent teacher. Experience is also meant to be shared. (It is also meant to be shared during such situations. Newsroom management needs to make it clear to every employee that if an ethical dilemma surface a during coverage of a breaking news event, questions must be asked of them. If time has to be made, it will be made.)

Copies of the Society of Professional Journalists and the Radio and TV News Directors Association codes of ethics should also be made available to newswriters. But the ethical situations and evaluations should not be a regurgitation of the SPJ or RTNDA codes, or come from consultants or from one person like the news director. It should be a group of newswriters pooling and articulating their collective experiences in such situations. For the newswriters and managers who help create this playbook, it should be an excellent refresher course in ethics necessary for anyone who has been in a newsroom "too long." It will help less experienced journalists with the black and white situations, but more importantly, the quagmire of gray they will inevitably encounter

most often. The factors that take away consideration time are out of individual journalist's control. Therefore, the time should be taken beforehand, to ensure breaking news events are covered ethically and according to utilitarian principles.

Philosophical Rationale

The common journalistic justification "the people's right to know" is a basic utilitarian concept. Utilitarianism holds that determining what is right or wrong is based on "what will yield the best consequences for the welfare of human beings" (Clifford, Fackler, Rotzoll, & Brittain-McKee, 1998, pg.14). In terms of the press, the social good of utilitarianism is an informed citizenry, therefore, the democratic principle of the people's right to know. Gauthier (1999) believes the Principle of Utility, then, can be used to justify the people's right to know when it serves the end result of an informed and engaged public. The people's right to know is a common justification used by journalists to defend their actions or news product. The Society of Professional Journalists has even written into its Code of Ethics a utilitarian principle: "The public is entitled to as much information as possible..." (SPJ, 1996).

Utilitarianism as articulated by British philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stewart Mill relies heavily on consequentialism. Christians, et. al. (1998) sum it up this way:

"It suggests that we first calculate in the most conscientious manner possible the consequences of the various options open to us. We would ask how much benefit and how much harm would result in the lives of everyone affected, including ourselves. Once we have completed these computations for all relevant course of action, we are morally obligated to choose the alternative that maximizes value or minimizes loss. To perform any other action knowingly would result in our taking an unethical course" (pg. 15).

Consequences are rarely considered in TV news primarily due to time restraints. But utilitarianism holds that it must if the principle is to be used as a justification.

Breaking news situations do not allow the luxury of discussion time. Although breaking news stories, such as the O.J. Simpson white bronco chase, received much criticism after the fact, it is generally accepted that “that the public’s right to know provides the moral basis” for the airing of information and pictures (Gauthier, 1999, pg. 197).

It will be argued then in this rationale that the utilitarian concept does not apply in breaking news situations and is therefore an invalid and inappropriate justification. Because the Principle of Utility relies on the careful consideration and discussion of consequences, in the majority of circumstances, it cannot be applied to breaking news situations. Because advanced technology brings it to the viewer live, there are an endless number of unexpected situations that could arise during live coverage. Certain aspects of live breaking news, such as unexpected suicides, are not anticipated or even considered. Because there is no time for adequate consequential consideration (because of technological, competitive and economical pressures) and because these unforeseen consequences are getting through the gatekeepers and are being televised, show that utilitarianism cannot be used as a justification in these circumstances. Utilitarianism already breaks down “because the predictions of consequences are never precise,” (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, pg. 76-77) add to that the idea that consequences are never considered and what happens is a complete breakdown of the concept.

It will also be argued that editorial decisions are not always made for the good of the public. Decisions of what is broadcast are often made for the good of the station or the individual, not the public it is “serving.” These decisions can be based on economics or

ratings, the competitive pressure of getting it on the air before the other stations, and even technological pressures from “going live for lives sake.” When this occurs, the individual station or the self comes before the public, which is a direct violation of the utilitarian concept.

Following criticism (within industry and without), journalists often invoke the “people’s right to know” as their justification for coverage missteps. Thus ethical mistakes, cloaked in the principle of utility are increasing concurrently with the rise in breaking news coverage. When the breaking news process, product and effects are studied, it becomes clear they are actually contrary to utilitarian principles.

Utilitarianism in Media Terms: Greater Good & People’s Right to Know

Mill’s version of utilitarianism is a teleological ethical theory that focuses on the consequences of actions in terms of happiness and unhappiness. This traditional version is hedonistic with Bentham and Mill believing that preventing pain and promoting pleasure are the only desirable ends (Christians, et. al., 1998). Later utilitarians expanded the notion of happiness and thus it became a guideline for making ethical choices. For the media, the Principle of Utility holds that newswriters act and make choices that promote the greater good. The primary role of a social press then, grounded in the people’s right to know, is found in the media’s contribution to the public or “greater good.” Therefore, the effects of the news product must be considered (Gauthier, 1999). The right to know and the greater good go hand in hand because the greater good is promoted when the people’s right to know the information is satisfied.

Most would agree the press has a social responsibility. The media have a responsibility to the people who depend on it for messages and also because the media

have the power to greatly affect individuals and groups (Elliot, 1986). Elliot (1986) continues that journalists call this responsibility different things, “serving as watchdog,” “representing the people,” “educating the people,” “serving the public’s right to know,” or “contributing information and opinions for the public discussion” (Elliot, 1986, pg. 35). Social responsibility does not necessarily advocate communitarianism and civic journalism. Utilitarians define that social responsibility as the “greatest happiness principle” (Mill, 1971, pg. 18). Mill (1971) holds that actions are right if they promote happiness, wrong if they promote harm or pain.

The Principle of Utility also says that within that concept of the people’s right to know is the journalist’s responsibility to make the choice that promotes the greater good. Philosopher Louis P. Pojman (1990) defined Utilitarianism’s standard of right or wrong as “the comparative consequences of the available actions: That act is right which produces the best consequences” (pg. 75).

In terms of breaking news, large audiences turn to television when a breaking news situation is occurring. The September 11th attack again serves as an excellent example. Television news’ greatest strength is visual immediacy. Television is used to get the message out quickly and to the most people possible. It is the public’s right to know about these stories and it is for the perceived greater good that journalists inform them.

Mill’s Utilitarianism (1971), translated literally is the “greatest happiness principle.” Actions are “right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to reduce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain” (pg. 18). One problem with this idea is that the principle can never demonstrate the difference between harm and pain and too much harm and pain. Harm can mean anything

from a minor embarrassment to the loss of a person's life. Even Mill (1971) admits "harm to others" is a vague concept. He tried to clarify the concept by using phrases like "prevention of pain," and asking "what means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains?" (pg. 19.) He tried again in his 1959 essay *On Liberty* by using phrases like "conduct... calculated to produce evil to someone else" (pg. 9), "an act hurtful to others" (pg. 10), "acts injurious to others," "a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public" (pg. 80). By mentioning the individual, this last phrase even contradicts his basic belief in the greatest good for the greatest number. How many people constitute "others?" One? Two hundred? Two hundred thousand? Weighing such a vague concept can be a difficult task for journalists, but not an impossible one.

The Importance of Consequences

The discussion thus far has been how and why Utilitarianism is used by newswriters to justify the information they gather and disseminate. The "people's right to know" and balancing good versus evil, is just one portion of the principle. If the Principle of Utility is invoked as a justification, it is then up to the news organizations and individual newswriters to consider ramifications of newsgathering and the actual news product.

Utilitarianism is the most popular form of consequentialism. This type of thinking is also known as teleological ethics, from the Greek word *telos*, meaning goal (Christians, et. al., 1993). It asks what goals do you want to reach and defines moral behavior as whatever leads to those goals (Christians, et. al., 1993). It looks at the effects of the acts rather than the acts themselves. For example, under utilitarianism, paying a source for his story is acceptable if it is a story of great social value or interest. Utilitarians believe

balancing the social value or greater good calls for the thoughtful evaluation of the various options available to us. But, is paying the source the right choice if the consequences include the loss of the journalist's reputation? Journalists must ask how much benefit and how much harm will be done and to who, including themselves (Christians, et. al., 1998).

Consequence assessment is never precise and does not claim to be. But while breaking news situations are also not free of all uncertainties, a concerted effort needs to be made to assess those consequences, both short and long term. A practical application of Utilitarianism requires this.

Utilitarianism as Justification

Time limitations do not allow for ethical discussion of consequences

Breaking news situations have been referred to as non-routine news by Berkowitz (1992), a “what-a-story” by Tuchman (1973) or a “Holy-shit” story by Romano (1986), the latter two because of what journalists exclaim when they find out about it. “What-a-stories” call for newsrooms to go into emergency mode, different from the every day newswork routine. Non-routine stories receive better play than routine stories and they require a stretching of news resources in terms of time, personnel and equipment (Berkowitz, 1992). Without such routine changes, the story could not be covered adequately “within the organizational time structure for producing the news” (Berkowitz, 1992, pg. 364). Already the absence of time is a factor in coverage.

The necessity of discussing consequences if using a utilitarian justification in breaking news situations has been discussed. So what pressures confound television

breaking news situations that cause no or limited time for ethical discussions of consequences? There are three ever-present pressures that have increased exponentially in the last few years. They are: 1.) technological immediacy, 2.) competitive concerns, and 3.) economic concerns. All three forces work together to cause decisions to be made “on the fly.”

Immediacy is touted as television news’ greatest strength. Technology allows breaking news events to come into the audience’s home as they happen. It allows journalists to get information to the public quickly and to bring viewers “into” important events (Gans, 1979). At one time there was a “news cycle” even in television news. Now it is always deadline and Fallows (1996) calls this the “tyranny of technology” (pg. 182).

Most stations have multiple live capabilities, live trucks, satellite trucks and in most large market stations, helicopters that offer an up-close birdseye view. When stations have the capabilities, they use them. Reporting live is an increasingly dominant value in television news today (Tuggle & Huffman, 1999). Consultants say live reporting will distinguish a station in its market if done well and frequent use justifies the cost of the equipment (Tuggle & Huffman, 1999).

If technology allows stations to be first with breaking news events, competitive pressures fuel that need. There is a competitive ethos that encompasses television newsrooms. It is a powerful set of norms according to Ehrlich (1995). Many journalists view their jobs in terms of competition as they try to “scoop” each other (Ehrlich, 1995). (Competition is a capitalistic and libertarian idea, and beating the competition is as an

individual goal. Both are contrary to utilitarian principles.) Competitiveness is said to be one of the key traits for succeeding in television news. (Ehrlich, 1995). It is not just expected of journalists, but it is an internalized driving force. Journalists want to win at all costs. “They want to be the best. They hate getting beat on a story... In fact, good newspeople not only want to cover the biggest story of the day, they want to handle it so well that their competition cries” (Filoreto & Setzer, 1993, pg. 138). An obvious manifestation is the bank of monitors in every newsroom used to keep track of the competition. When news breaks, stations want to get the story on the air as fast as they can, before their competition does. News directors or general managers do not want to see the story “on the other guy” before it is aired on their station. “Being first” is a source of pride for the journalists and shows viewers that this news organization is aggressively covering the news. With so many local channels and cable channels offering news, it can often set one station apart from the others.

If competitiveness fuels the need, then economics (or ratings) gratify it. As stated earlier, viewers turn to television initially when breaking news occurs because it offers both information and pictures. The breaking news coverage of the Oklahoma City Bombing, for example, amassed huge audiences. Breaking news initially increases ratings. Being first on a story and continuing to cover the story well can increase credibility and image in the community and thus continue to increase ratings. Ratings are the bottom line in television news. A station’s revenue will only increase if its ratings increase. Plus, affiliate stations learned early on that the number one news station is almost always overall the number one station in the market (Eastman & Ferguson, 1997). The balancing of market interests and public interests is not a new dilemma faced by

journalists. But again, with the pressures of technology, competition and economics increasing in the latter part of the 1990s, the dilemma is more at the forefront.

It has been illustrated that decisions have to be made in a split second. It could mean the difference between being first or last with a breaking news event and the latter as has been shown, is unacceptable. All three of these factors work together to decrease the time available for ethical discussions of consequences. The technology to go live is readily available, the competitive pressure is overwhelming and the economic pressure (quest for ratings) is the ultimate prize. When these three factors work together, the goal is often not to inform the public, but to win on three different, yet similar levels.

For greater good, station or self-promotion?

In a highly competitive climate, coverage of a big story almost to the saturation point, which is often the case in breaking news situations, is important to the station and the individual newswriters. This counters the utility of covering the story for the greater good. The station and the newswriters are stakeholders. They have just as much to gain from exhaustive and extensive coverage as the viewers do.

Television stations have a lot invested in their coverage of breaking news. Not only do stations want bragging rights of breaking the story first, but more importantly they want the increased ratings and image that are naturally progress when a story is covered well. Excellent breaking news coverage can solidify a station as credible and as the one to turn to when something big happens. An example of this is WFAA-TV, the ABC affiliate in Dallas, Texas. In August of 1985, the station pre-empted programming to cover the crash of Delta flight 191 that claimed 137 lives. In an unprecedented move, WFAA broadcast live for six consecutive hours, something unheard of 15 years ago. *The*

Dallas Morning News media critic Ed Bark said it cemented the perception in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that if anything important happens, turn to Channel 8 (Holley, 1994). Because the other stations were slow to react, their continuous coverage increased WFAA's image as "the one to watch" and that in turn increased its ratings. WFAA has been the dominant number one station in the market ever since. Stations are aware ratings increase when breaking news stories happen. The payoff also comes in the future. With successful coverage comes an increase in trust and credibility. Therefore, ratings may not only increase in the present, but in the future.

Covering "what-a-stories" can make or break a career. Individual journalists may be more aggressive in their reporting, or make questionable decisions in their newsgathering in order to meet personal goals. Many careers have been in advanced due in part to the journalists' involvement in coverage stories such as the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing and the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. Again, Utilitarianism demands that individuals set aside their goals in order to promote greater overall utility.

In the above situations, a Potter Box justification would ask where do the loyalties lie? Are decisions about how to cover this story being made to inform the public? Improve the image and ratings of the station? Or to promote the reporter's career? More than likely all three are at work. Under the Principle of Utility these cannot coexist. A sophisticated version of utilitarianism argues that the conflict between pursuing goals for the public and goals for the individual cannot be resolved (Ashford, 2000).

Results of failure to consider consequences

The importance of consequences in a utility-based justification has been discussed. Now it is time to explore some real world consequences in breaking news situations that

resulted from that lack of consequential dialogue. Although anecdotal, because the plan proposed earlier aids in the practical application of the principle, real world examples of where the principle was applied futilely and failed will be examined. The consequences given in this paper are taken from the criticisms in industry publications of coverage of specific breaking news events. These real world consequences have been labeled ethical “missteps,” “mistakes,” “problems” and even “lessons” in television breaking news coverage.

Live suicide

Short-term consequences are the most tangible and perhaps the easiest to evaluate. Highway police chases have become a popular breaking news event. With the onslaught of the helicopter genre, a high-speed chase can be followed live from start to finish. In April 1998, one such high-speed chase in California took an unforeseen turn. Late one afternoon, police shut down a major freeway near Los Angeles International Airport when Daniel V. Jones, upset over what he considered shabby treatment from a health maintenance organization, pulled his truck over and began shooting in the air. Six of the seven English-language stations in L.A. broke into programming, some of it children’s programming, to carry the event live. MSNBC carried it nationally. Hundreds of thousands of people across the country watched as Jones lit himself, his dog and his truck on fire. They stayed live on the air as he shed some of his clothes. And then the viewers saw Jones get a rifle from the fiery pickup and shoot himself in the head. Despite many on-air apologies, the “people’s right to know” was still used as a defense. Jeff Wald, news director at KTLA, the WB affiliate said “You have a rush hour where 250,000 people were affected by somebody who was shooting at people on the freeway.

That’s a news story.” (Rogers, 1998). But even as the flames engulfed Jones, the stations stayed with it, including KCOP. Where the consequences so unconceivable? A spokesman for the owners of KCOP said, “Any time you cover something live and un-edited you’re taking a risk” (Rogers, 1998). The risk lies not in hoping something is going to happen for the greater good, but the risk lies in something harmful happening. While all end scenarios cannot be predicted, is it not expected that a high-speed chase involving police could end in a deadly crash or a shoot-out? In hindsight, many who watched believed the man’s actions before he took his life were clearly indicative of a problem waiting to happen. A writer in *News Photographer* even asked “Who didn’t know this was coming?... Did anyone bother to ask?” (Alkire, 1998). And that is exactly the point. The consequential dialogue was not there, even in a case so seemingly black and white.

This live suicide could have also had psychological effects on the children watching cartoons at the time. More importantly, it could affect those who were watching who may be harboring suicidal tendencies. Numerous studies have shown TV news coverage and fictional movies about suicides appear to trigger a temporary increase in the number of teenagers who kill themselves (Phillips & Carstensen, 1988, Gould and Shaffer, 1985 in Bower). “Imitation suicides” are widely considered to take place, for example the instances of clustered teenage suicides in the 1980s. Most stations have a policy against airing suicides.

Televised hostage situations

In crisis situations such as hostage situations, the controversy is not about the public’s right to know, but when they need to know it. Today’s technology is not only a

tool for journalists, but also for the criminals. Journalists need to assume that a suspect holding hostages or keeping the police at bay is watching television, listening to the radio or even surfing the Internet. The decisions to air helicopter shots of police tactical positions can put hostages and officers in harm's way. The April 1999 shooting at Columbine High School gives numerous examples where live TV threatened lives. Perhaps the most memorable is the wounded and bloody male student escaping out of the second story window of the school library. When this aired live, it was not known if the gunmen were dead or alive. With the school equipped with numerous TVs, an unforeseen consequence could have been the gunman attacking the student and the SWAT officers during the escape.

Two other Columbine examples also include students. Students with cell phones who were still hiding inside the school called in to the local TV stations. One Denver station aired the conversation live as the student's location was revealed. In yet another example, coverage was live as armed officers removed students from the school building. The criticism was similar. Patti Dennis, news director of KUSA-TV said the decision to go with the live shot was made in seconds with little time for discussion (Sherer, 1999). An ethical dialogue should have taken place that considered the safety of students and officers and if waiting to show the video until everyone was safe could have served the public better.

Inaccuracies

Inaccuracies caused by speed are another coverage misstep that can lead to short term and long-term consequences. In breaking news, the facts of a situation can change rapidly. It is not uncommon to report unconfirmed or inaccurate information in the first

minutes of coverage, which is only corrected as time goes on and the situation reveals itself more fully. In November 1999, an extreme example unfolded in San Antonio, Texas. Two television stations and one radio station reported a story that never was. KENS-TV was the first to go on the air with reports of an elementary school shooting. Rival KSAT-TV was quick to follow with reports of shots fired, glass shattered and at least 14 people injured. With visions of Columbine, panicked parents flocked to the school. In reality, there had been no school shooting. The newswriters misunderstood emergency medical services and police radio chatter and had somehow been able to confirm their misinformation. The real story involved the school's custodian. On his way to school, he had been shot at by another driver and was injured by broken glass. He waited until he arrived at the elementary school before calling police. Once again, the greater good was used as a justification. "We didn't do it because we wanted to be first," said Bryan Erickson of KTSA radio. "But we thought we had accurate information, and we wanted to let parents know" (Pompilio, 2000).

In hindsight, Erickson said he should have waited "the five minutes and make an extra phone call" (Pompilio, 2000). Five minutes may be all that is needed to hold an ethical discussion about the choices about to be made. The consequences were frantic parents in the short term and a loss of credibility to the stations in the long-term.

In the above case, corrections were made immediately; apologies were made for days. While newspapers often run corrections, TV stations are not always forthcoming about admitting mistakes. Despite one study's finding that as many as one-third of the stories on local TV news have inaccuracies, only a sixth of the stations run corrections as often as one a month (Smith, 1999). Many news directors believe admitting mistakes

might cause viewers to lose confidence in their news (Cremedas, 1992). Is the rational that by not admitting mistakes we are serving the greater good? Or is the greater economic good of the station being served instead?

In the above cases, long-term consequences for the stations included loss of trust and credibility. Credibility is also an audience builder that can be irreversibly damaged by bad decisions. Loss of credibility in a station by the audience can also have huge ramifications in economic terms. Without trust, ratings can decline, which in turn decreases advertising revenues.

Lind (1995) says when the audience is faced with a press with no form of standards or codes they feel powerless and “unable to effect change in a media system which does not always meet its needs” (Lind, 1995, pg. 373). If the stations had taken the time to discuss the consequences and acted accordingly, the greater good and “needs” could have been served. The greater good is served when consequences are weighed. The examples given are exemplars. But breaking news events often are, extreme situations to be handled carefully and thoughtfully.

In defense of the industry, most stations do have policies in place against airing suicides, hostage situations, even riots going back to the Kerner Commission of the late 1960s. With technological advances and the growth in competition grows, breaking news is raising an old issue in a new way. Breaking news does not provide an adequate justification for non-compliance with these policies.

Main Points of Breaking News Ethical Discussion Plan

Once again, I want to outline the main points of the ethical dialogue plan to be executed mainly before, but also during and after breaking news situations. They can be remembered by using three “Ps” and two “Cs.”

- 1.) Write down the station’s basic news **Philosophy**.
- 2.) Write down basic station **Policies** applicable to breaking news.
- 3.) Create a **Playbook** with breaking news scenarios.
- 4.) Critique your breaking news coverage.
- 5.) Make **Codes of Ethics** readily available.

Conclusion

Although television news audiences continue to shrink due to industry and Internet competition, television still remains the most influential news venue (Merli, 2000). Under utilitarianism, “they have an obligation to act in a way that is in the interest of the people whom they affect” (Elliot, 1986). Providing information to fulfill the people’s right to know is not enough, the consideration of consequences is the additional foundation of responsibility needed under a utilitarian justification.

An increasing number of ethical decisions in TV newsrooms are being made in breaking news situations. The information presented in this study is unfortunately anecdotal, but nonetheless, authentic. Breaking news situations are a huge storefront for the audience to view ethical inventory. Each situation is unique and when the event is live and being interpreted by the viewers and the journalists at the same time, mistakes will be made. But the store shelves appear in need of restocking when ethical mistakes are made over and over again. If stations have ethical dialogue plans in place, it is

possible some questionable decisions will be avoided and an even greater good will be served.

This article focused on the lack of consideration of consequences. Newsgathering techniques, perhaps executed unethically, were not addressed. By invoking a utilitarian justification, *any* act can be justified. Any action or behavior can be said to produce a “greater good” for society at some time down the line (Wuliger, 1991). Unethical newsgathering techniques may also lead to a loss of trust in the media by society and therefore research into this area is also needed.

Perhaps the greatest good for the greatest number is served through just allowing individuals access to information and there is no need to dwell on consequences of the news product. But that blanket statement can also be construed as a copout. If the utilitarian concept of the people’s right to know is going to be invoked, it is necessary for the greater good to be evaluated through consequence consideration. Utilitarianism can be a valid justification for ethical mistakes made in breaking news coverage only if thoughtful consideration has taken place.

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RTUS

The Chromakey¹ Ceiling:

An Examination of Television Weathercasting and Why the Gender Gap Persists

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Why Television Weather Matters

Friday, May 12--This evening a remarkable, yet increasingly common event occurred on many local television stations. Weather interrupted paid programming and lead local newscasts. From the border of Mexico to Canada and beyond, an impressive squall line of thunderstorms was developing, lighting up radar screens for more than a thousand miles with a zig-zag of red, yellow and green. Severe weather threatened people and property from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. A tornado touched down in central Texas, killing one man. 80 mph winds and softball size hail pummeled the upper Midwest. Millions of dollars in damage occurred.

Local TV weathercasters are often the first and only source of crucial life-saving information at times like these. We are often the only scientific contact the public has and we have a tremendous responsibility (Ryan, 2000). Bob Ryan, Chief Meteorologist for WRC-TV in Washington D.C., has been a TV weathercaster for more than 25 years and like many of his colleagues takes his work seriously.

On May 3, 1999, 65 twisters ravaged central Oklahoma in a six-hour period and the most severe F5 tornado plowed right through Oklahoma City, the state's largest city. While more than 8,000 buildings were destroyed, the number of deaths was actually surprisingly low (Henson, 2000). Henson credits warnings from the National Weather Service, which gave an average lead time of 32 minutes and local television and radio stations that went into saturation coverage. The convergence of TV's influence and the watch/warning system has helped lead to a dramatic drop in deaths from all weather-related events, except flash flooding (Henson, 2001).

According to audience surveys, weather is the most important part of the newscast (Smith, 2000). Weather is the common denominator of news (Wagner, 1985). Given the demands, visibility, and potential impact of this exclusive group of people, the dearth of journalistic scholarly research about this profession is surprising. As the author of the comprehensive book, *Television Weathercasting* wrote, "I was appalled to find that television weather was all but ignored as a subject of serious inquiry" (Henson, 1990). This research, hopefully, takes a small step to ameliorate that situation.

Literature Review

Television weathercasting is an idiosyncratic profession. Very few jobs compare. Being a good scientist is only part of the task and few non-TV meteorologists understand the demands of the broadcast business. Being only an entertainer, as previous episodes in TV weathercasting allowed and

encouraged, is no longer enough to do the job well either. Proprietary consultant research abounds, but it is not made widely available. Ask any consultant and they will all say the same thing--weather is the primary reason people choose a local television news product, but there is little understanding beyond an individual weathercaster's "Q" rating as to how this profession operates.

A search of leading journalism and communications journals found limited research on television weather. Since 1985, when the *Journal of Broadcasting* became the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 284 articles have been published in this peer-reviewed journal, but a key word search discovered that none of them included television weather. A hand-check of every article written in the journal from 1956 to 1984 showed the same result: not one scholarly article about television weathercasting.

Journalism Quarterly has published three articles on the subject, all being published in a six-year period from 1976 to 1982. In 1976, Tan discovered that television is the media most often used for weather information, but the reporting was inadequate for many users. The primary complaint in that research was that weather was only available during the actual news program itself (Tan, 1976), which is no longer true with the proliferation of 24-hour weather information over-the-air and on the web. A second article analyzed the accuracy of weathercasters' forecasts (Gantz, 1982), which remains a pet peeve of TV weathercasters today. While interviewing them, many expressed their frustration that the only time the

WHO IS TAN?

OK - I WAS CONFUSED

academy showed interest in their work was to critique their forecasts. A third JQ article measured what audiences remembered from their evening weathercasts. This study was also disconcerting to some weathercasters because it found that viewers retained very little of the information presented, but that overall most viewers were "satisfied" with television weather as it was (Hyatt, Riley & Sederstrom, 1978). Finally, a fourth JQ article focused on newspaper coverage of weather, and concluded that more space was being devoted to weather in daily newspapers, primarily because of the influence of USA Today's expansive coverage (Anderson & Anderson, 1986). An article in the *European Journal of Communication* measured the impact of seasonal and specific weather events on television viewing, but did not specifically look at weathercasters. In that study, researchers concluded that weather events must be factored in any predictive model of media use, because it is one of the most important structuring features of social life (Roe & Vandebosch, 1996).

While scholarly journals in journalism have eschewed the study of televised weather, peer-reviewed journals in other disciplines have given the topic more study, but not as much recently either. *The Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society (BAMS)* has published the most peer-reviewed articles related to television weather. More than 30 have appeared in that publication over the past 65 years beginning with "Popularizing the Weather Broadcast" in 1938 (Fidler). The number of articles regarding television weather in that publication peaked in the late 1950s and 60s, when the AMS was creating its credentialing program. The largest number of articles in one

year was 1968 (five), when the debate over the AMS seal escalated and accelerating technological advances changed the work atmosphere for weathercasters. An on-going concern in *BAMS* is the value of “professional vs. nonprofessional” weathercasts (Beebe, 1970; Booker, 1962). As defined by these authors, professional weathercasters were those who had a meteorology degree and the American Meteorological Society (AMS) seal of approval. Using ratings data, both studies concluded that audiences preferred professional weather programs over those “presented by amateurs” (Booker, 1962).

The National Weather Association (NWA) is the other large organization that many television weathercasters join and it publishes a quarterly newsletter. *National Weather Digest* is not peer-reviewed, but often contains articles of interest to television weathercasters. One such article in 1982 (Lazalier) reported findings from a survey of 74 TV weathercasters in the top 40 markets. Results from this current research will be contrasted with findings from that survey, since it is the only other comparable study in the literature.

Another scientific journal also occasionally considers aspects of television weathercasting. *Weather and Forecasting* is more likely to focus on the technical issues related to forecasting, modeling and radar, for instance, rather than the actual workings of the job of being a television weathercaster, but has published two articles by the same author, both analyzing which TV weathercasters are most likely to deviate from National Weather Service forecasts (Driscoll, 1988; 1986).

Some more esoteric journals, such as *Climatic Change*, have recently included articles that looked at how weather is reported on television, but not specifically at the role of weathercasters. One author found a discernable increase in coverage of televised weather, especially since 1988, when “global warming exploded on the news agenda” (Ungar, 1999).

Trade magazines, such as “*Communicator*,” the publication of the Radio and Television News Directors’ Association and “*Programmer*,” the publication of the National Association of Television Program Executives, have also given sporadic attention to television weather. These articles often focused on management’s point of view: “When Weather is the Lead: A Producer’s Perspective,” (Wagner, 1985) or “Weather Mania” (Prince, 1987). One article by geographers (Trapassc, Bowman, & Daniel, 1985) measured weathercasters “important link in the chain of communication of weather data and forecasts,” and includes some survey data that can be compared to the current study. The other major focus of the professional magazines were the changes occurring in broadcast and weather technologies that impacted the weathercast (Myers, 1987; Veraska, 1986; Paulson, 1985;) That coverage peaked in the 1980s, even though technological advancements have continued their rapid development.

Popular publications on weather and TV weather proliferate. *TV Guide* has perhaps published the largest number of popular articles on television weather, most of them focusing on the personalities of the weather anchors, such as “TV Weatherpersons Insist on Hamming it Up” (Simon, 1989), or “Weathermen Should Think Before They Speak” (1977).

In a report to the surgeon general, LoSciuto (1972) argued that television weather is one type of media communication whose impact has not been researched enough. His interest focused primarily on public preparation for weather-related events, but his concern for more research remains justified, even more so today, as televised weather has become more pervasive and influential.

Weather As News

Weather is intimately related to life and living. Long the primary topic of farmers, many of us express more than just a passing interest in weather. According to The Weather Channel research, 40% of us fit into a category they call "the weather-engaged" audience (Seabrook, 2000). Other authors use terms such as "meteorology addicts," (Carter, 1998), or "weather-weenies" (Davidson, 2000). What's clear is that many of us seek out weather news and the consistent popularity of the topic has led to many major changes in the news business.

Everyone in the audience is affected; everyone is interested and concerned (Wagner, 1985). Because of this high audience interest and consultant research, producers across the country are instructed to intersperse their local weathercasters at important intervals in a newscast to maximize ratings (Smith, 2000). In the 1990s, more than 200 weather stories appeared in the three national newscasts each year, more than one per week per network, which represented a huge increase over time (Ungar, 1999). CBS News began a

regular feature on their evening news called "Weather Watch," with regular reporting on topics such as El Nino, La Nina, droughts, hurricane forecasting and global warming. ABC News has now added a U.S. Weather map graphic toss to a commercial break during their evening news. Data from the Center for Media and Public Affairs (1998) also documented a similar dramatic increase in weather coverage. From 1989 to 1995, weather coverage wasn't among the top-ten topics on the nightly news. In 1996, it was eighth, and in 1998 it was fourth, with more than eleven hundred weather-related stories.

Many television stations regularly spend more in a year on new weather technology than on the entire news staff budget (Murrie, 2001). Once the technology is in place, promotion of the latest Doppler, Nexrad, or other specialty tool, becomes another major investment. Increasingly the dominant weathercaster in a television market is also one of the highest paid, often eclipsing main news anchor salaries (Stone, 2001). Weather matters to the audience and is big business for television, but this was not always the case.

At first, weather was often treated as a light diversion from the seriousness of the news (Henson, 1990). WNBT-TV, an experimental station (later WNBC) serving at best a few thousand viewers in New York City, is often cited as the first American television weathercast (Monmonier, 1999). On that broadcast a cartoon character named Woolly Lamb introduced the forecast by singing, "It's hot, it's cold, it's rain, it's fair, but I, as Botany's Woolly Lamb, predict tomorrow's weather" (Henson, 1990). Botany's "wrinkle-proof ties" sponsored the segment.

After that light-hearted start, scientists next dominated the profession, bringing their expertise from World War II forecasting to the new medium of television. The war effort had trained thousands of enlisted men in meteorology and dozens of those veterans showed up on local news programs in the 1940s (Henson, 1990). Weather news was treated seriously with one news director remarking, "the first training a new man (sic) in our newsroom receives is learning to write the weather story" (Charnley, 1948). These first shows bore little resemblance to the flashy, graphic-filled weathercasts of today.

As Henson notes, this period was quickly replaced in the 1950s by a period he calls "The Pranksters Arrive." But some of the "no-frills, dry, pedantic" meteorologists did survive on-air past the 1950s. As a young news director in 1981, I will always have fondness and respect for my first TV weatherman who fit this mold. Paul Sorenson was already in his 60s and brought a wealth of experience and credibility to our 6 PM newscast. As a 23 year-old news director and anchor with an even younger and more recent college graduate as a co-anchor, Paul truly ANCHORED our news program. Retired from the National Weather Service, he always arrived at the television station with paper copies of the 500mb chart: something he coveted dearly, and as producers and directors we had to accept even though a static shot of a barely legible piece of paper hardly made for "good TV." It was clear that he took great care to prepare his forecasts. He never quite learned to manage his on-air time and his forecasts were often rushed at the end. Often he ignored

the floor director's commands to wrap it up. Not because he was arrogant, malevolent, or even poorly sighted, but because he understood that his five minutes were the most important of the newscast and if he wasn't finished then we would just "have to cut junk at the end of the show." So we did. Like consultants and weathercasters today, Paul Sorenson understood the significance of his role. Results from this current study indicate that small market weathercasters do get more on-air time than their larger market counterparts, but nothing close to five minutes anymore. A TV weathercaster in Chicago actually reported 10 minutes of air-time for his show (Youle, 1952)!

Paul retired during my three and a half-year tenure as news director. We had evolved from film to videotape and Paul could see the writing on the chromakey wall. When he later died, I reported a long, five minute retrospective on him that brought the greatest audience response I've ever seen in the business. That experience taught me that TV weathercasters connect to their audiences in ways poorly understood by current research.

While the change from the avuncular TV weathercaster didn't occur at my small television market until the early 1980s, the trend had already shifted nationally. With the explosive growth and increasing competition of television in the 1950s, weather evolved as a way to make the news more palatable. The result was television weather's wildest, most uninhibited period (Henson, 1990). Since most data and forecasts were taken directly from the National Weather Service, a variety of puppets, costumes, animals, and gimmicks were used to present forecasts in a more "entertaining" manner.

Women and Weather

It was in this time period that women first made forays into this exclusively male bastion. But they were not treated or taken seriously in this phase and that tradition has tainted their contributions to this day. Carol Reed began work at New York's WCBS in 1952 and is credited with being the country's first female weather reporter (Henson, 1990). Her tenure lasted 12 years, which exceeds the longevity of most weathercasters in this survey. Like most women in the field at the time, Reed was not trained in meteorology. In fact most of the "weathergirls" came from entertainment backgrounds, some as a "USO-singer-dancer-comedienne" (Cindy Dahl, WTTG, Washington), or "former name-band singer" (Kay Field, WISH, Indianapolis), or "Miss Press Photographer" (Eugenia Burke, WARM, Scranton) (Davis, 1955).

For women, getting science training was difficult. In 1949, Joanne Simpson became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in meteorology, despite the objections of many of her male faculty instructors at the University of Chicago (Taylor, 1984). Not even the most esteemed researchers, it seemed, were immune to the belief that women did not belong in science (Henson, 1990). This attitude has continued to adversely influence the role of women in TV weathercasting today.

Even for some women who did have more experience in science, they still bore a special burden during television weather's gimmicky phase—many of them were forced to play sex object, delivering weather in various states of

undress. Tedi Thurman appeared behind a shower curtain on NBC's Jack Paar "Tonight Show" giving weather reports laced with double entendres (TV Guide, 1957). Maxine Barrat (WITV, Hollywood, Florida) did weathercasts clad in bathing suits (Davis, 1955). Viewers in New York were treated to midnight weather forecasts from a woman dressed in a nightgown, tucking herself into bed (Seldes, 1963).

One woman who did not fit the stereotype was Marcia Yockey who debuted on WFIE in Evansville, Indiana in 1953, after 10 years working for the National Weather Service. She was only able to join the bureau as a replacement for forecasters who were called into military service, but her unique combination of skills elevated her status and made her a pioneer in the business that many women in television weathercasting still refer to as an icon and inspiration.

The "Proper" TV Weather Forecast

The acquiescence of the demands of the television medium for visual stimulation, what some call style over substance, set the gauntlet for what has continued for the ensuing decades: an on-going battle for the "proper" way for TV weather to be broadcast. In hopes of returning professionalism to TV weathercasting the American Meteorological Society began its "Seal of Approval" program in 1957. It was conferred on those weathercasters who met the Society's guidelines for "completeness, clarity and professionalism."

Speaking for the Society on the need for such credentials in a TV guide column entitled "Weather is No Laughing Matter," Francis Davis wrote:

"If TV weathermen(sic) are going to pose as experts, we feel they should be experts. We think many TV weathermen (sic) make a caricature of what is essentially a serious and scientific occupation, and help foster the notion that forecasters merely grab forecasts out of a fishbowl. (p10)

The requirements for the first seals issued in 1959 were a written application and a film clip of one representative weathercast. Other AMS members were also recruited to observe weathercasts secretly. The sample weathercasts were "graded" by an AMS committee and seals awarded to qualified applicants. As early as 1959 TV Guide observed that gimmicky weathercasting was on the wane:

"Television weathercasts have matured from off-the-cuff reading of the official weather bureau reports by announcers or pretty girls to serious interpretations by station meteorologists with official weather training."

The AMS seal process remains in effect today, although it too has gone through much metamorphosis in the past 40 years. Since 1959, the AMS has certified more than 1100 television weathercasters as well as 150 in radio (BAMS, 2000). Requirements were too rigorous for many "wannabe's" (Monmonier, 1999). In February 1982, the National Weather Association (NWA) created an alternate credential for weathercasters (Henson, 1990). The NWA began in 1976 as a more informal organization than AMS and initially its seal required no meteorology degree or passing a written exam, which allowed

more weathercasters to join. Although considered inferior by some meteorologists, the NWA has now awarded more than 600 seals since 1982, and now requires a written exam and re-certification and training to keep the seal, something the AMS no longer requires. Another concurrent study is measuring the perceived value of these seals, as well as the debate among television weathercasters about certificate programs in "broadcast meteorology" that some purists consider inadequate training.

TV Weather 24/7

No discussion of television weather would be complete without acknowledging the tremendous impact of The Weather Channel (TWC). When TWC premiered in 1982 it looked like a bad idea. Amid skeptical reviews, many wondered how a 24-hour weather network could survive. In its first season it lost more than 10-million dollars (Seabrook, 2000). Now, TWC is in more than 75-million U.S. homes, and versions are available to another 26-million people around the globe (Petrozzello, 1997). More than 15-million people tune in at least once every day (Seabrook, 2000) and during extreme events, such as Hurricane Floyd, those numbers set cable-viewing records. TWC is available in 97% of U.S. homes with cable, eclipsing other networks (Monmonier, 1999).

In Austin, Texas, viewers are also provided TWO local 24-hour weather sources. In conjunction with a local commercial station and the Time Warner cable company, Channel 44 is all weather, all the time. Many weeks the channel, squeezed between Lifetime and The Nashville Network, is nothing

more than geographic wallpaper, showing a local, statewide and then a national map on a rotating basis with an automated voice. But on days when storms do threaten the region, Channel 44 provides action and drama equal to any other network's fare. The radar is on time delay, but quickly allows viewers to track a storm's path and projected arrival. It is not surprising to find Channel 44 on in Austin bars, restaurants or department stores on days when weather is happening. It seems only visitors to town stand astonished that an entire cable channel is devoted to just weather. Given the limited bandwidth and the pressure to clear new cable offerings, it would be tempting to replace Channel 44, but Time Warner officials are wary of such a program change, given the overwhelming public response (Stanley, 2001). Time Warner also offers its cable subscribers a 24-hour local news station, which provides wall-to-wall coverage during weather events. Using street-level radar, viewers can track the precise path of a storm on their television set (assuming electricity has not been knocked out!).

Method

A four-page survey was mailed to 445 randomly selected local television weathercasters. The Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook was used to identify all network affiliates and independent stations in the United States with local newscasts. Then a rotating system of primetime/main anchor, morning/noon anchor, and weekend weather anchor was used to identify one person at each station to receive the survey. Once the position was selected, a personal phone call was made to the station to get the correct name and spelling of the

person currently in that position. Then a survey specifically addressed to that person was mailed along with a cover letter identifying the investigator and the reasons for the inquiry.

A total of 217 TV weathercasters responded to the survey for a response rate of 48.8%. This is a high response given that it was a one-time mailing and no post-card reminders were mailed out. Survey research typically garners a response rate between 19-27% WITH postcard follow-ups (Dillman, 1978). No code numbers were used on the surveys to insure confidentiality and anonymity, which contributed to the higher response rate. The high response rate, I believe, also indicates a high level of interest among weathercasters to know more about their colleagues and their profession.

The goal of a probability sample is a systematic selection procedure to represent the universe with a minimum of sampling error. Overall this sample of weathercasters represents 127 markets in the U.S., and 47 of the U.S. 50 states (no responses from Wyoming, Alaska, and New Hampshire). What follows then, in this study, are results from one of the largest random samples of TV weathercasters ever conducted. These independent findings establish a baseline for future longitudinal research, as well as provide illumination into the state of the profession at the turn of the 21st century. I'm greatly indebted to the hundreds of TV weathercasters who expressed interest in this research and participated in the survey and/or interviews.

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Results and Discussion

Descriptive Demographics

Given the internal debate about credentials, one of the most important variables used in these analyses was whether weathercasters had one, both, or neither of the two seals of approval. One hundred and eight of the 217 TV weathercasters said they had the AMS Seal of Approval (109 did not) making for a neat 50/50 split. Fifty-seven said they had the NWA Seal of Approval, 26 TV weathercasters reported having both seals and 77 said they had neither. This distribution enhanced statistical analyses.

Other important variables measured included: gender, market size, newscast position, educational training and background, and experience. Market size was broken into four categories, based on the loosely generated concepts of large to small TV markets. 22% of the sample was from the top 25 markets, 16% from markets 26-50, 32% from markets 51-100 and 30% from the smaller markets 101 and above. This classification allowed for comparisons between and among market size characteristics.

Just over half of the sample (51%) said they were the main/prime time weather anchors, while 25% self-identified as primarily the weekend anchor and 20% were responsible for the morning and noon weathercasts. The remaining four percent identified as part-time weather anchors, largely performing other reporting tasks in the newsroom.

Just over half of the weathercasters (54%) said they had earned their highest degree in Meteorology/Atmospheric Sciences, while 10% chose other

sciences. This figure is nearly identical to a smaller survey of weathercasters conducted in 1982 (Lazalier), in which 52% self-identified as meteorologists. Nearly a quarter of this sample (23%) reported Journalism/Mass Communications as their highest degree and 5% indicated a combination of Journalism and Science.

The Chromakey Ceiling

While technically a demographic characteristic and used as an independent variable for further analyses, gender plays such a pivotal role in this sample and in television weather, that it is first reported as its own separate finding. While women “break the glass ceiling in TV news,” (Stone, 1997), this same kind of progress does not hold true in the sub-area of television weather. Only 15% of the sample is female. This low figure is consistent with other, limited data. The AMS reports that only 10% of its television sealholders are women (4% in radio). “Female meteorologists” represented one percent and “female broadcasters” accounted for 11 percent of a smaller sample of weathercasters twenty years ago (Lazalier, 1982). Women have fared much better historically, when they made up as much as a third of all weathercasters in the mid 1950s (Henson, 2002), and in other areas of broadcasting. Women now make up 40% of the overall television news force (RTNDA, 2001) up from 13% in 1972, two years after the Federal Communications Commission extended its affirmative action rule to women. Women now comprise a quarter of all television news directors (Stone, 1997)

and 29% of network correspondents (Huff, 2002). However, as the data and literature review here have suggested, women in television weathercasting remain a smaller minority.

"It's hard to overcome history," says Heidi Sonnen, a meteorology instructor at Penn State University and a former television weather anchor. Penn State has the largest undergraduate meteorology program in the country, and Sonnen says the number of women enrolling in their program has not increased much over the years. One positive sign, she says, is that the most recent freshman class is almost 50% female.

Not only are the numbers of women weathercasters low, further analyses discovered that very few of them are prime-time weather anchors (Table 1). More than half the women in this sample are working weekends, compared to one-fifth of the men. Only a quarter of the women are prime-time weather anchors while 57% of the men have the same position. This association is statistically significant ($\chi^2 (2) = 15.0, p < .001$).

Women also tend to be clustered in larger markets. More than a third of the women in the sample are working in large urban markets, compared to one-fifth of the men. Similarly, a much smaller percentage of women are in markets 101+ (15%) compared to a third of the men. While this association is not statistically significant, it is a striking contrast to a smaller survey of television weathercasters done in 1985 (Trapass, Bowman, & Daniel), in which a third of women were employed in the smallest markets. Although aggregate numbers have remained low, perhaps women are rising up the market ladder,

and perhaps one day in newscast position as well, and further longitudinal study would be illustrative.

Correspondingly, very few women have earned the AMS seal of approval (Table 2). Only a quarter of women have the seal compared to more than half the men, which is also statistically significant ($\chi^2 (1) = 7.87, p < .005$). This is not true of the NWA seal of approval, where nearly identical numbers of women and men have earned that credential. This is a likely remnant of women's delayed entry into the sciences, the lack of institutional support as evidenced in the literature review, and the strict AMS requirements of a meteorology degree, which still very few women in this country have earned.

Longevity and Tenure

When answering the question about "how long have you been at your current station?" weathercasters were given a fill in the blank option. The mean for all 217 weathercasters was five and half years. This is a good example though of how the mean alone does not provide enough illumination. The mean is skewed because of three weathercasters who said they had been at their current stations 27, 28, and 29 years. No other respondents answered above 20 years. The median is a much more accurate reflection of the mobility of TV weathercasters. Half of all weathercasters had been at their current station 3 years or less, and the mode for the sample was one year (26). Including those who said less than one year, the number rises to 50, or 23% of TV weathercasters, who have been at their current station one year or less.

According to other research, the average TV newscaster moves to a different station every three years (Stone, 2001). Television has always been an itinerant profession and this is obviously the case for weathercasters.

One of the questions this research wanted to answer is whether having a seal of approval impacts tenure. Conventional wisdom has suggested that having a seal, especially the AMS seal, leads to more security and status at a station. In this sample, having just the AMS seal is statistically correlated with longer tenure at the current station, but only compared to those who have neither seal (Table 3). Having just the NWA seal does result in a slightly higher mean, but is not statistically significant with any other group. Those with both seals actually have shorter tenures at their current station than the mean, which may seem counterintuitive, but not to many weathercasters. "These are the "go-getters" in the industry who believe having both seals makes them more marketable and are likely to move on and up more often," said one member of the AMS Board of Certification. The 77 weathercasters with neither seal have the shortest tenure of all groups, which could also indicate neophytes to the business.

Having the AMS seal is also associated with market size ($\chi^2 (3) = 15.53, p < .001$). Weathercasters in larger TV markets are much more likely to have the AMS seal. Advertisements for TV weathercasters² now often demand "AMS seal required" in addition to previous experience, reflecting what weathercasters perceive as management's predilection for this particular seal. It appears that having the AMS seal is a desirable commodity in larger television markets. Why

news directors prefer this credential is an area ripe for further research. No such association was discovered with the NWA seal of approval.

The Lead Story

As other research has suggested, increasingly weather is often the lead story in many national newscasts. Weathercasters in this sample said that weather is the top local story on average three days per month. More than nine times out of ten the reason is severe weather (93%). Snow takes second place for leading the newscast (46%).

Large market weathercasters (#1-25) reported a mean of 3.5 days a month of weather leading their local news, compared to just under three for all other markets, but no statistical significance was found with this, or any other, tested variable.

The Daily Grind

Television is a business of precious time. A thirty-minute newscast likely contains only 20-22 minutes of content when calculating commercial advertising (Smith, 2000). Although consultants report the weather segment is the most watched part of the local news, it is often considered the "accordian," because it gets squeezed or stretched regularly (Sealls, 1994/95). Only one previous study has measured weathercaster time. In that smaller study of large market weathercasters that was not peer-reviewed, the average

amount of time reported for the weathercast was three minutes and 23 seconds (Lazalier, 1982).

That figure is very close to the mean amount of time for all 217 weathercasters in this sample of three minutes and 14 seconds. The data show large market weathercasters get the least amount of time on average to do weather, two minutes and 51 seconds (Figure 1). Small market weathercasters get more time, three minutes and 35 seconds, which using ANOVA tests to compare means, is statistically significant with all other market sizes ($p < .05$). To put it into other terms, over the course of one week of evening newscasts, a weathercaster in Topeka, Kansas, market #142, may get an extra two minutes and twenty seconds of face time during the show than a similar weathercaster in San Francisco, market #5.

Surprisingly, no other variable had any other discernable impact on the amount of time a weathercaster is given in a newscast. The other variables tested included: having either seal of approval, amount of experience, newscast (early evening, late show, noon, weekend), or gender. This finding confirms what many in the business have long suspected, but was never before documented: in smaller markets, television weather is given more prominence. So, while status and pay increase with market size, the trade-off for most TV weathercasters is that the amount of precious time to tell the weather story in the newscast becomes more constricted.

In the smaller markets, television weathercasters not only get extra time in the show, they also shoulder more responsibility than their colleagues in

other markets. The mean number of full-time weathercasters on staff for the top 50 markets is almost three, but for markets 101+, it's only 2.

The daily duties of television weathercasters are strikingly similar across all tested variables. Weathercasters were asked to assign a percentage to fill-in-the-blank questions about their "average work responsibilities." Almost half of their day (47%) is spent preparing computer graphics for the weathercast. These days competence in weathercasting implies skill in computer graphics as well as an understanding of the atmosphere (Monmonier, 1999). Bowser (1997) suggests that the proliferation of graphics is an "if you've got, use it" mentality on the part of station executives who approve spending for state-of-the-art weather technology. Actual weather forecasting takes up 36% of a typical weathercasters' day, and community service and public appearances places third at 15%. Fortunately, for most weathercasters, "administration" consumes only one percent of their daily duties, and in interviews, nearly all of them expressed satisfaction with this aspect of their work.

It's interesting to note the consistent percentages for all duties: actual weatherforecasting comprises only a third of almost all television weathercaster duties. Clearly, then, understanding meteorology is not the only key to success for a TV weathercaster. None of the independent variables, market size, gender, seals of approval, experience, or newscast, had any statistical impact on the daily duties of TV weathercasters. So, it seems, when a television weathercaster changes jobs, the station call letters, technology,

community, and local weather may differ, but the actual duties of the position will be remarkably familiar.

A consistent 15% of weathercaster time is spent in community service, often speaking before civic and student groups. Again, no statistical differences were discovered among any of the subgroups, suggesting this is perceived as one of the regular duties of today's weathercasters, no matter the market size or newscast position. This is an intriguing finding that may also benefit from further kinds of investigation. Is this expectation greater or less than other news personalities? How did this become part of a weathercaster's job? What are the benefits and drawbacks of such policies? As with many areas of this study, the data has provided some answers, but also laid foundations for additional questions to consider.

Conclusions

The purpose of the weather forecast should be to help people make better weather-information-dependent decisions (Brooks, Witt, & Eilts, 1997). Research consistently finds that television weathercasters provide that information (Smith, 2000; Hyatt, Riley, & Sederstrom, 1978; Tan 1976). Television weather demands an unusual combination of attitudes: relaxed and conversational but energetic and upbeat, and it's a lot more difficult than it looks (Mirsky, 2000).

December 12. An ice storm coats nearly the entire state of Texas. Numerous power outages, thousands of trees downed, and hundreds of traffic accidents and several fatalities are reported as wide spread ice up to an inch thick arrives overnight. But this storm is no surprise. For exactly a week, Austin TV weathercaster Jim Spencer has been warning his audience about the possibility of just such a storm on this very Tuesday night. He always carefully chose his words, given the extended time frame and the number of variables that needed to come together to create this treacherous scenario, but he continued to cautiously advise watching the weather, and soon the National Weather Service and other forecasters were sounding the same alarm. When the storm did arrive, most people were already safely ensconced in their homes, as most major employers, including the University of Texas at Austin sent everyone home early. Because of the forecast, schools had already been cancelled in advance of the weather. While the effects of the ice storm did impact the city and state, its arrival was no surprise to those with even limited media exposure, and reinforces the important influence TV weathercasters can play in our society.

While women have achieved some successes in other aspects of television news, this research indicates the progress is much more modest in television weather. Only 15% of television weathercasters in this sample are women and the majority of them are working weekends. Very few women have earned the AMS seal of approval, which many jobs now require. This research has identified why some of these discrepancies occur, and has suggested

additional research ideas to provide further insights into this disparity. This study has also analyzed the influence of several other variables on the profession of TV weathercasting, including seals of approval, newscast position, experience, and market size. Finally, this research asks that television weathercasting be taken more seriously by the journalistic academic community in order to better understand its important role in our society. As more research is conducted and more longitudinal data is acquired, changes, developments and trends can be more easily discerned and diagnosed.

TV weathercasting seems to thrive on change. Often sweeping, dramatic change, not unlike the natural conditions the business forecasts. This study has presented a review of relevant literature in advance of baseline data on the state of television weathercasting at the beginning of this new century. The findings offer a snapshot at this integral aspect of journalism and science communication.

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Notes

1. The chromakey process was invented by NBC in the 1950s to merge two filmed images together into one picture. With the explosion of computer graphics in the 1980s, chromakey became an essential element of weathercasting. The weathercaster stands in front of a solid color background, usually blue or lime green, and the chromakey substitutes that color for a selected image, whether it is a radar or satellite image or moving video. The weathercaster pulls off the illusion by looking at off-camera monitors showing the overlaid image and must coordinate hand motions to precise locations on the map.
2. Advertisement for weathercaster (3/22/2002, Shoptalk)
Weekend Meteorologist/Live Reporter. Ski the Olympic slopes. Hike the Wasatch front. Sail the Great Salt Lake. Mountain bike Moab. Deliver weather where you live.....OUTDOORS! KUTV, Salt Lake City's CBS O & O is looking for a weekend meteorologist/live reporter. Energy, personality and AMS seal required! Send VHS tape and resume today.

**NETWORK AND LOCAL COVERAGE OF THE YEAR 2000 PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION**

By

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ABSTRACT: Network and Local Coverage of the Year 2000 Presidential Election

A content analysis of network and local stories broadcasted during the 2000 presidential election used two units of analysis: 1) Individual stories and 2) the news segment, which consists of one or more partisan stories broadcasted per day. Overall, the coverage showed that Bush and Gore campaigns received roughly equal coverage in terms of prominence and time across the election period. A Bush source was more likely to be the first source presented, but Gore sources received more airtime.

Individual stories however, tended to be unfair and imbalanced, favoring either Bush or Gore, while *news segments* more often tended to be fair and balanced, presenting both Bush and Gore sources equally. However, the stations broadcasted only one story on one-third of the days, which may have given infrequent viewers a negative impression of fairness and balance. A comparison between network and local coverage shows that network coverage was more often fair and balanced.

INTRODUCTION

More than half of likely voters regularly obtain information about political campaigns from either network or local television news coverage.¹ For general information, the public primarily relies on network and even more so, local news broadcasts.² News consumers expect coverage to be fair, representing both sides of a story, and balanced, representing both sides equally.³ For their part, journalists extol fairness and balance as one of the bedrocks of quality journalism; its absence raises concerns in academia, the government and more importantly, the public.⁴

Broadcast journalists control the structure of stories when choosing, for example, what sources to use, the time to give each source and the video. Moreover, the broadcast journalist influences story placement in the newscast, a decision driven by the newsworthiness of the story as it relates to other news stories.

The purpose of this study is to further understand story and newscast structure in network and local television news coverage of elections. The researchers assessed structural factors for *individual* stories and for *news segments* made up of one or more stories broadcast during a particular day's newscast. The study first focuses on the following structural attributes of *individual* stories: 1) How partisan sources are used and ordered in the story; 2) the time and attention given them in terms of broadcast seconds, 3) visuals and 4) sound bites. Researchers then examine *news segments* to determine the ordering and relative attention given to individual election stories during a newscast. Story and segment analysis assess the use of partisan sources, and calculate, specifically, balance within stories and within segments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bias in the News

Two authors received considerable media attention in the year following the 2000 election for their critiques of liberal bias in the news media. Bernard Goldberg's "Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News" climbed to the top of *The New York Times*' bestseller list. Goldberg, who worked as a reporter and producer for *CBS News* for 28 years, winning seven Emmy Awards, lambastes his former network for having a liberal news bias.⁵ William McGowan, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute in New York City, wrote "Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism," in which he uses examples of news coverage in print and broadcast news to demonstrate how political correctness has watered down journalism.⁶

The concern over news bias and the potential public response to it has motivated scholarly studies of media credibility and professional attempts to guard against such flaws.⁷ For instance, the Freedom Forum pledged \$1 million for research and other projects on newspaper fairness and how that influences credibility.⁸ Based on a subsequent series of national roundtable discussions, the Freedom Forum also produced handbooks detailing "best practices" for newspaper and broadcast journalists.⁹

Journalists can control only some factors that lead to the charge of news bias. Audiences, for instance, can be biased in their perception of the news. Vallone et al., for example, found that pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli students both rated TV coverage of Lebanon as biased against their cause.¹⁰ Gunther similarly found that individual attitudes on issues and group involvement predicted attribution of bias to media.¹¹ Moreover, societal and media factors that editors or reporters cannot control may also lead to news

bias. Shoemaker and Reese note that influences such as societal ideology, news organization resources and news routines affect such factors as time and news hole that constrain how reporters search for sources and use them in stories¹²

But reporters, particularly when they are covering highly visible state or national elections, also have important *gatekeeping* power that may offset the influences noted above. Certainly reporters are motivated by societal norms, which emphasize that citizens need information about “all sides” to guide their voting in an election. Campaigns also attempt to supply information to journalists, which may alleviate some resource scarcity in their news organizations. Further, news organizations see election reporting as one of their central missions, and following norms of fairness may help to deflect possible criticism from partisans.¹³

Consequently, this study focuses on the structural factors of stories that reporters and their immediate superiors directly control. In packaging an election story for broadcast, reporters may decide to include one or both sides, how much time to give candidates, whether to include on-air quotes or to do voice-overs. Reporters also decide on the presentation order of sources in a package, including which candidate in an election story speaks first. News producers are most likely to decide whether to lead with an election story, and whether to run just one or several stories in that day’s election segment. Producers also decide whether to cover election news through anchor readers or reporter packages.

Previous Research on TV News Bias

Bias in election coverage, particularly “partisan balance” of stories between Democrats or Republicans, is a common research topic for studies of print and broadcast

media.¹⁴ Few studies focus on the story or segment structural characteristics of television election coverage. Many more studies focus on network election coverage than local TV news studies.

Scholars have found mixed results on partisan bias. Evarts and Stempel who examined the three major TV networks, the three major news magazines and six major newspapers covering the 1972 presidential campaign, found no clear-cut bias in the media's election coverage that year.¹⁵ Hofstetter, studying several media to determine bias in election coverage, also found mixed results.¹⁶ Johnson probed election news bias in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the three major television networks during the pre-primaries and the primaries of the 1988 Democratic presidential primaries.¹⁷ He found that candidates who performed poorly got negative coverage, while those who did well enjoyed more positive coverage. In a study of the 1996 elections covered by *CNN*, *ABC*, and more than 40 national newspapers, Domke et al. found balanced media coverage despite charges from the Republican candidate and the public suggesting "liberal bias" in the media. However, Lowry and Shidler's studies of TV sound bites during the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns found more liberal sound bites of non-candidate news sources.

*Local television election news has generated little scholarly interest, whatever office, despite its importance as an information source to local viewers.*¹⁸ Christ et al. found in a study of stations in San Antonio, Texas, that most of the 1996 election coverage concerned President Clinton's visit to the Alamo.¹⁹ Studies of gubernatorial and other state races in Ohio²⁰ and Michigan found a similar scarcity of coverage.²¹

Carter et al., for example, found that only 4 percent of the hard news stories broadcasted by four local TV stations covered the 1998 gubernatorial election campaign in Michigan.

Partisan and Structural Balance of Election Coverage

Much research has focused on network election news stories, while few studies have examined local TV election stories. Much research has illuminated the partisan balance of election stories, but few studies have examined the structural balance of such stories. Finally, much research has focused on individual election stories, while few studies have examined daily election segments. The present research aims to help fill those gaps by illuminating the partisan and structural balance of individual election stories and segments in network and local TV coverage of the year 2000 presidential election.

This research follows Carter et al.'s approach in measuring television news coverage by first examining discrete, quantitatively measurable parts of each election story to determine how that story balanced election opponents. Next, the study assesses the broadcast station's daily "election segment," which may be made up of one or more individual election stories.

Finally, aggregating both stories and segments illuminates the partisan and structural balance of the election coverage as a whole. Partisan balance, following past research, illuminates whether news stories give more attention to the Republican or Democratic candidate. Partisan balance therefore measures the degree to which a candidate has set the campaign "agenda" relative to the opponent, and therefore the public's agenda.²² Structural balance illuminates the degree to which coverage emphasizes one candidate over the other, regardless of party. In other words, was the

typical newscast or story constructed in a balanced manner? Further, how often could viewers encounter such structurally balanced or imbalanced coverage? Such encounters with structurally imbalanced coverage may influence public perceptions of media bias and credibility.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Partisan Balance of Coverage

Much past quantitative research illuminated network attention paid to Republican and Democratic candidates in presidential races. Carter et al. found differences in partisan domination between stories and segments of local TV news stations of the 1998 Michigan gubernatorial race. No research however, has looked at partisan balance in both stories and election segments covering a presidential election, or has compared such balance in presidential election coverage between networks and local TV stations.

Hence:

RQ1: Did the partisan domination of broadcast stories and segments favor Bush or Gore?

RQ2: Was there a difference in the partisan domination of stories and segments broadcasted by networks and local stations?

Structural Balance of Coverage

This research also examines the structural balance of broadcast stories and segments covering an election. Balanced news attention to Republicans or Democrats in a newscast may result from “offsetting” imbalanced stories in a segment rather than individually fair and balanced stories. In fact, it is plausible that the typical election story, reflecting events, such as rallies or staged speeches, is more likely to be structurally imbalanced. Hence:

RQ3: How imbalanced is the typical story and segment covering the campaign?

RQ4: Do network and local station stories differ in the structural imbalance of their stories and segments?

Carter et al. found that stories that led newscasts were more structurally balanced than those elsewhere, and that reporter packages were more balanced than anchor readers. It seems intuitively plausible that a lead story, being more important than others, would get more attention to its fairness and balance. Stories packaged by reporters also are more likely to be well-considered and researched, and therefore constructed with balance norms in mind. Moreover, networks have more resources than local stations and may therefore have the news staff to ensure more balanced coverage of the presidential election. Hence:

- H1: Stories leading newscasts will be less imbalanced than other stories.
- H2: Reporter packages will be less imbalanced than other stories.
- H3: Network lead stories will be less imbalanced than local station lead stories.
- H4: Network reporter packages will be less imbalanced than local station reporter packages.

METHOD

This study explores these questions and hypotheses with a content analysis of all election stories of the 2000 presidential campaign broadcasted during the major evening newscast of three networks, *ABC*, *CBS* and *NBC*. A convenience sample of local stations included *KING*, *KVOA*, *WLNS* and *WOOD*.

The four local stations selected serve diverse regions of the country and vary in the size of the market they serve, but each leads in its market. *KING*, the *NBC* affiliate in Seattle, Washington is a No. 12 market station; *KVOA*, the *NBC* affiliate in Tucson, Arizona is a No. 71 market station; *WLNS*, the *CBS* affiliate in Lansing, Michigan is a 107 market station, and; *WOOD*, the *NBC* affiliate in Grand Rapids is a No. 38 market station.²³ Each network and station's major evening newscast was selected for analysis.

These broadcasts were taped from the Labor Day start of the campaign to November 6, the day before election day.

Partisan and Structural Balance Measures

Fico and Cote in studies of newspaper coverage of elections have defined components of an election story's partisan and structural balance that were adapted in the Carter et al. study and followed in this research.²⁴ Story balance for newspapers was defined as the extent to which sides on an issue or in an election were treated evenly in terms of the prominence and space given their assertions. The authors argued that readers of election stories may judge their fairness or bias relatively quickly, within a few paragraphs.

A broadcast story, unlike print, gives viewers rapid exposure to content that cannot easily be reexamined. As with print, that story might present only one side in an electoral contest or two (or more) sides. The order in which the sides are presented, and the relative length of their exposure, will similarly influence the likelihood that a viewer will be attentive to a particular candidate. However, the broadcast medium also affords candidates the opportunity for visual exposure through sound "bites" and other images of their candidacies. Such exposure, especially if different for the candidates, can potentially have an impact on public perception.

Therefore, partisan and structural balance of television stories were determined in this study by the ways attributed assertions by candidates and their supporters were used. First, the story was coded as one-sided or two-sided depending on whether assertions supporting only one or both candidates were included. Four story components, following Carter et al., were used to assess partisan and structural balance of stories containing

campaign assertions. The story was analyzed to determine the side making assertions first and the total time given sides for their assertions. The balance measure also included whether visuals of the candidates or their campaign activities were included, under the assumption that viewers focused more on such visuals than the anchor or reporter's words. Similarly, the balance measure included whether the candidates were quoted on air rather than quoted or paraphrased by reporters or anchors.

The *Partisan Balance* of a story was then determined by counting how many of the four story components (order of appearance, total time given assertions, candidate visual and on-air candidate quotation) favored either Bush or Gore. For example, if Bush was seen first in a story, the order component was judged to favor Bush's candidacy. If Gore was favored by three story components and Bush by one, the story as a whole was judged to favor Gore. The story was judged to be balanced if an equal number of components favored the candidates.

The *Structural Balance* of a story was similarly determined by counting how many story components favored each candidate. However, in the case of structural balance, the number of components favoring Bush was subtracted from the number favoring Gore, and the absolute value of that figure is taken. The resulting scale could range from 0, indicating a perfectly balanced story (and also one balanced on the partisan balance measure) to 4, indicating that the same candidate dominated every measured story component.

Analysis of election segments of each station also was made for each day in which at least one election story was broadcasted. Each segment was analyzed to determine if one or more stories included covered both Bush and Gore, or only one of

them. If the first story in a multi-story segment covered only one of the candidates, the segment was examined to see if a second story focused on the opponent. If the only story or stories broadcasted that day focused on one candidate, the researchers coded the day's segment as one-sided. If the story or stories broadcasted that day focused on both candidates, the segment would be coded as two-sided.

Reliability of Measures

The coding procedure employed in this study initially had one researcher and two research assistants identify election-relevant stories and another researcher validating that judgment. Two researchers then coded the stories. A coder reliability assessment was made on about 5 percent of randomly-sampled election stories containing campaign-relevant assertions. Percentage of agreement on variables relevant for this analysis ranged between 81 percent and 100 percent. Scott's Pi computations to correct for chance agreement ranged from .78 to 1.0.

RESULTS

The networks carried 571 stories on the election during their major evening newscast. Some 309 stories, or 54 percent of the network stories, featured Bush or Gore campaign statements on the election. About 47 percent of *ABC's* coverage featured Bush or Gore assertions, whereas 59 percent of *CBS's* and *NBC's* coverage had such partisan assertions.

The local stations carried 285 stories on the election during their major evening newscast. Some 159 stories, or 56 percent of the local stories, featured Bush or Gore campaign statements on the election. About 59 percent of *KING's* coverage featured

Bush or Gore assertions, whereas 87 percent of *KVOA*'s, 53 percent of *WLNS*'s and 45 percent of *WOOD*'s coverage had such partisan assertions.

The 468 partisan stories were further content analyzed: 104 from *ABC*, 103 from *CBS*, 102 from *NBC*, 60 from *KING*, 26 from *KVOA*, 36 from *WLNS* and 37 from *WOOD*. These stories ran from September 4 to November 6.

Networks varied from 44 to 46 in the number of days they covered the presidential campaign; local stations varied from 17 to 37 days. About 17 percent of the stories led newscasts, 34 percent were the first or only story that day on the election and 49 percent of the stories followed other election stories. Most network coverage each day consisted of at least two stories and some days as many as seven or eight. Most local station, daily coverage consisted of one story and some days as many as four.

About 3 in 5 of the election stories were reporter packages. The rest of the stories were almost evenly divided among anchor voice-overs (vos), anchor voice-over/sound on tape (vo/sot), and other types of stories. About 70 percent of the network stories used reporter packages, whereas only 40 percent of the stories covered by local stations used packages. About 35 percent of local coverage used anchor vos.

About half of all stories were one-sided. Not surprisingly, therefore, stories were often structurally imbalanced as well. Indeed, viewers had only a 1 in 10 chance of seeing an election story that was structurally balanced, and a 1 in 3 chance of encountering a story imbalanced in every measured way.

Election segments, however, were more fair, with individually imbalanced stories paired to achieve balance in the day's newscast. In fact, only 11 percent of the segments were unfair in the presentation of the candidates. Of course, this was more likely to occur

when stations broadcast only one election story on a day. Almost 29 percent of such one-story segments were unfair.

Partisan Balance of Coverage

Answering Research Question 1, the partisan domination of broadcast *stories* slightly favored Bush (47 %) more than Gore (44 %) and the rest were evenly divided (See Table 1). The partisan domination of broadcast *segments* again slightly favored Bush, with Bush appearing first in more segments (54%) than did Gore (47%) (See Table 2). Overall, Gore got more time in more segments than did Bush (50% to 46% of segments).

Findings addressing Research Question 2 showed small, but consistent differences in the partisan domination of stories between networks and local stations. Local station stories were more likely than network ones to favor Bush (See Table 1) as were Bush story position and time in local station segments (See Table 2). Moreover, when a candidate was covered first, that candidate also received more airtime. About 64 percent of all the coverage follows this pattern: In 33 percent of the stories on a given day, Bush led and was given more airtime, and in 31 percent of the stories, Gore led and was given more airtime (See Table 3). This pattern was the same in both network and local station broadcasts.

Structural Balance of Stories

Findings addressing Research Question 3 on the structural balance of individual *stories* indicate that few viewers got a chance to encounter a structurally balanced

presentation of both candidates. The mean structural balance score of stories was 2.44 on a scale of 0, indicating a perfectly balanced story, to 4, indicating that the same candidate dominated every component measure (i.e. the candidate made assertions first, got more total time for campaign assertions, got the only visuals, and was the only candidate quoted on air). Stories were therefore imbalanced in more than two out of the four structural elements (See Table 4).

Research Question 4 asks whether network and local station stories differed in their structural imbalance. The results showed that the stories covered by the networks were slightly more imbalanced than the stories covered by the local stations (See Table 4).

Story Balance Predictors

Hypothesis 1 predicted that stories leading newscasts would be less imbalanced than other stories. This hypothesis was contradicted by these data (See Table 4).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that reporter packages would be less imbalanced than other stories. However, reporter packages proved to be more imbalanced than any other story type except for anchor voice-over/sound on tape stories (See Table 4).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that network lead stories would be less imbalanced than local station lead stories. This hypothesis was supported (See Table 4).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that network reporter packages would be less imbalanced than local station reporter packages. This hypothesis, however, also was contradicted (See Table 4).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the coverage showed that Bush and Gore campaigns received roughly equal coverage in terms of story prominence and time. A Bush source was more likely presented first, but Gore sources more often received more airtime. Results showed that nearly half of the *individual stories* tended to be unfair, favoring either Bush or Gore, but the *news segment* tended to be fair, presenting both Bush and Gore sources. These findings are consistent with Carter et al.'s findings on local television station coverage of the 1998 governor's race in Michigan. Here too, a news director considering total election coverage may be satisfied that the candidates were treated equally.

However, the networks and stations broadcasted only one story on one-third of the days, and infrequent viewers of the coverage may well have obtained a negative impression of its fairness and balance. More than half of the stories broadcasted by local stations were the only election story that particular day. Moreover, the viewer had only a one in four chance of seeing an approximately balanced story, while nearly half of the time the viewer was likely to see a story that was structurally imbalanced by at least three out of the four measured components. Network stories were, on average (and contrary to expectations), more *imbalanced than local stories*. However, those network stories were also more likely to appear in multi-story segments that were, as a whole, fair. Network and local stories given more prominence in the newscast --- and therefore more likely to get viewer attention --- were, again contrary to expectations, more structurally imbalanced than others. One possible explanation is that especially newsworthy campaign-driven or related events, by their nature one-sided, displaced balance norms on a significant number of days.

Remarkable similarities existed in the network and local treatment of the Bush and Gore campaigns. The local stations' use of news feeds from the networks likely explains this result in part. Local news station personnel relied on national coverage on the network level to update their viewers on the *national* presidential campaign. Possibly, too, the local stations included in this study may not be typical of such stations generally. But it would be strange if local stations attempting to cover a national election ignored the feeds their network affiliate provides. Obviously too, these network feeds will be supplemented by the local station's own coverage if and when campaign events or developments occur nearby.

Overall, network segments were individually more fair and balanced than those of the local stations' included in this study. Given more resources and more news hole time, the networks were able to cover the election thoroughly each day, and consequently, more fairly. Indeed, some 70 percent of network stories were reporter packages, almost always paired to cover both candidates, compared to 40 percent of local station coverage. Local stations used anchor voice-overs for nearly a third of their coverage, which was six times more than the networks used the story type. Again, this is likely because networks had more money and more resources such as reporters and producers, enabling the use of the longest story type, the package. Also, local stations had to provide a news hole for local coverage, whereas the networks do not, giving networks more time available for election coverage. This also may explain why local stations more often broadcast only one story on the election on a given day and why local reporter packages were more balanced than network ones. Local stations could not rely on offsetting packages to

create overall balance. Local station producers and reporters may thus have been more careful to balance packages.

The fact that 94 percent of network segments were fair likely reflects conscious attempts by news personnel at providing fair coverage of the presidential elections. By contrast, local stations were three times more likely than networks to have one-sided segments. Network producers and reporters may have established methods to monitor and control their coverage. Local stations may want to do the same. In any event, whatever bias observers attributed to networks, little evidence of bias was found using the methods employed in this study.

However, other methods such as surveys and focus groups should be used to determine how viewers perceive fairness and balance in individual stories and news segments. It is particularly important to assess if viewers are most attuned to the partisan or structural balance of stories and segments. Future studies using content analysis also should analyze the kinds of sources and story topics covered during the presidential election to provide a bigger picture of coverage of the 2000 presidential election. Finally, while judgments of the "tone" of coverage may be subjective, such assessment may provide a rich complement to the quantitative context provided by analyzing story and segment structure.

Table 1: Partisan Domination of Broadcast News Stories

| | Network | Local | All |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Favors Bush | 46% | 48% | 47% |
| Favors Gore | 45% | 42% | 44% |
| Balanced | 9% | 9% | 9% |
| Story N | 309 | 159 | 468 |

Table 2: Partisan Domination of position or time in Broadcast News Segments

| | Network | Local | All |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Position | | | |
| Bush First | 55% | 53% | 54% |
| Gore First | 46% | 46% | 47% |
| Time | | | |
| Bush More | 45% | 49% | 47% |
| Gore More | 54% | 43% | 50% |
| Equal Time | 2% | 7% | 4% |
| Segment N | 130 | 99 | 229 |

Table 3: Partisan Domination of both position and time in Broadcast News Segments

| | Network | Local | All |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|
| Bush First/Bush More Time | 32% | 35% | 33% |
| Bush First/Time Balanced | 1% | 4% | 2% |
| Bush First/Gore More Time | 22% | 14% | 19% |
| Gore First/Gore More Time | 32% | 29% | 31% |
| Gore First/Time Balanced | 1% | 3% | 2% |
| Gore First/Bush More Time | 13% | 14% | 14% |
| Segment N | 130 | 99 | 229 |

Table 4: Structural Balance of Broadcast Election Stories (Mean Structural Balance Scores. Higher scores indicate more story imbalance.)

| | Imbalance Score | N |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| All Stories | 2.44 | 468 |
| Story Origin | | |
| Network | 2.49 | 309 |
| Local | 2.33 | 159 |
| Story Prominence | | |
| Leads Newscast | 2.72 | 79 |
| First/Only Story | 2.05 | 159 |
| Following Story | 2.60 | 230 |
| Story Types | | |
| Anchor Lead-in | 1.58 | 36 |
| Anchor Reader | 1.85 | 13 |
| Anchor VO | 2.15 | 73 |
| Anchor VO/SOT | 2.69 | 54 |
| Reporter Package | 2.63 | 278 |
| Reporter Live | 1.93 | 14 |
| Lead Stories | | |
| Network | 2.66 | 56 |
| Local | 2.87 | 23 |
| Reporter Package Origin | | |
| Network | 2.72 | 215 |
| Local | 2.30 | 63 |

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On Print, Politics & the Public:
“Sesame Street’s” Impact Beyond Television

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Urban legend has it that in the winter of 1928, "Uncle Don" of WOR radio in New York finished an educational broadcast and said, "There! I guess that'll hold the little bastards." The microphone was still on. Following the utterance, Uncle Don was officially off the air.¹

It would seem that such a children's radio show may have set a precedent for television programming three decades later—American parents in the late 1960s were disgusted by commercials networks' lack of quality, educational programming. Most of children's programming was low budget, filled with violence and bombarded with commercials.² "Our concern is that children's shows do nothing," said Evelyn Sarson, a mother of two and founder of Boston's Action for Children's Television group. "Children's programs today, particularly the Saturday-morning cartoons, are merely fill-ins between a string of commercials."³

The group originated in 1970 to advocate more quality children's programming comparable to that of Joan Ganz Cooney's 1969 creation, "Sesame Street." This paper's purpose is to historically detail "Sesame Street's" background from March 1966 through June 1972. Nineteen sixty-six marked the inception of the idea that led to "Sesame Street," and by 1972 the show had won eight Emmys and raised the federal government's awareness of public broadcasting during Richard Nixon's term in office. Partly because of "Sesame Street," Nixon approved a plan in June 1972 that provided an additional \$15 million to public broadcasting to develop more children's programming. This paper also intends to explain print, public and political responses to "Sesame Street."

The paper incorporates children's television magazine articles found in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* from 1969 through 1972, which were the first

three years of "Sesame Street's" production. Preliminary literature reviews indicate that little has been published in scholarly journals regarding the print, public and political responses to "Sesame Street's" concepts of educational television. Much of the research examines the program's effects on audience members, particularly children, rather than on how the show affected media, public or political responses.

The show's idea began at a dinner party Cooney and her husband Timothy hosted in March 1966. One guest was Lloyd Morrisett, vice-president of Carnegie Corporation and a childhood education associate. He joined Cooney and Lewis Freedman in a discussion about TV. Freedman was the director of programming with Cooney at WNDT, New York's educational television channel. At the time, 90 percent of households with less than a \$5,000 annual income owned a TV, a rate more than those who owned bathtubs.⁴ There were an estimated 12 million three- to five-year-old kids in the United States who watched more than approximately thirty hours of television per week.⁵ Freedman felt that television was going to be the great educator of the future and suggested that Morrisett and other Carnegie representatives consider doing a preschool television show in cooperation with Cooney.⁶

Morrisett apparently thought about the idea, and in June 1966, Carnegie awarded Cooney a grant to study educational television programs through WNDT for fourteen - eighteen weeks.⁷ She was named president of the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), which was the organization Morrisett and the grant helped to create for children's television research. The study's objective was to determine the feasibility of a preschool education project that used television entertainment to teach.⁸ Cooney had already won an Emmy award in 1966 for her work on urban poverty.⁹ She said of the

idea, "I suddenly saw that I could go on doing documentaries about poverty and the educational deficit that poverty causes. I could do them forever and have no impact, and then I saw this could have an impact."¹⁰ The feasibility study was pivotal in Carnegie's agreement to nurture Cooney's brainchild, and it helped the Corporation rationalize its decision to pour millions of dollars into the CTW. Carnegie liked it. Cooney's work confirmed her abilities as an investigator and organizer and made her one of the leading authorities on television as education.¹¹

Public broadcasting in the mid-1960s was financed by state and local taxes, in combination with philanthropy, minimal underwriting profits and institutional budgets.¹² Little money was provided to educational programming development. Carnegie helped create the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967 before Nixon took office. The agency was concerned with commissioning national programs to local television stations. Morrisett recalled that he felt Nixon's administration was not affected or interested—and consistently attacked—public broadcasting.¹³ However, the federal government passed the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, which called for the creation of more local stations across the United States.¹⁴

While the government tackled public broadcasting, Cooney and her team conducted research on preschoolers' television viewing habits and found that kids best retained information from television commercial jingles and short segmented construction.¹⁵ Like commercials, she, too, wanted to sell something to 12 million preschoolers—learning. Cooney said she wanted a program that resembled the 1960s variety show "Laugh-in" by using commercial-like construction to teach children but

with a mixture of fantasy and reality. The segments would be less than six minutes long and, like commercials, have quick editing and catchy, educational jingles.¹⁶

Her final proposal was presented in January 1968, almost two years after the dinner party. Cooney submitted the proposal after receiving help from Morrisett, freelance writer Linda Gottlieb, Executive Associate for Carnegie Barbara Finberg, and Program Officer for the Ford Foundation Stuart Sucherman. The latter worked with Cooney to develop guidelines for CTW's relationship with National Educational Television (NET), which was the organization that agreed to air the program on its 170 stations. The fifty-five-page document was broken into six subsections that asked for between \$5 million and \$10 million to reach at least 6 million three- to five-year-old kids.¹⁷ The plan kept the background, problems and needs of disadvantaged kids primary during planning and promotion.¹⁸ In the proposal, Cooney noted that the nation would spend more than \$2.75 billion to put all three- to five-year-old kids in school at the public's expense. Her proposal emphasized a design that was strong in cognition, instructional in nature, and methodologically rapid and repetitive.¹⁹

By Valentine's Day of 1968, CTW had secured \$6.25 million from the contributions of Carnegie, the Ford Foundation, and the Office of Education, in addition to \$1.75 million from other governmental sponsors such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.²⁰ Thus, the coordinators hoped to reach at least half of the 12 million children.

On March 20, 1968, Carnegie, the Ford Foundation and the U.S. Office of Education held a press conference at New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel to publicly announce the formation of their experimental project. The press release stated,

The aim [of CTW] is to stimulate the intellectual and cultural growth of young children—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Television professionals will work in partnership with educators, psychologists and other child-development specialists to fuse education and entertainment into taped programs that will interest, engage and instruct four-and-five-year-olds. The most professional and sophisticated techniques of television will be used to teach subject matter ranging from concepts of numbers and shapes to recognition of the alphabet, and to advance such skills as language and reasoning.²¹

The press conference also formally announced the creation of the CTW and its goals. Morrisett recalled that CTW had briefed influential *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould about the program.²² Gould's article later read,

Electronically and educationally, the announcement last week of the creation of the Children's Television Workshop is a step both thoroughly welcome and long overdue. The harnessing of the home screen to prepare youngsters of four and five for the school days that lie ahead could go a long way toward meeting a national social need.²³

In May, Cooney chose David Connell, formerly executive producer of "Captain Kangaroo," to be executive producer and vice president for CTW. He joined others on the CTW staff such as Jon Stone, the senior producer and head writer. Edward L. Palmer, vice president and director of research for CTW, helped coordinate research efforts.²⁴

In order to achieve the fantasy Cooney desired, Stone suggested she seek the talents of Jim Henson.²⁵ He was a puppeteer who got his start at WRC-TV in Washington, where he was given his own late-night show. He called the show "Sam and

Friends." It was five minutes long and only lasted two weeks, but it was while doing this television program that Henson invented the "Muppet," which was a mixture of a marionette and a puppet.²⁶

During the summer of 1968, CTW held five, three-day seminars in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York to prepare educators, producers, writers, psychologists and other staff members for "Sesame Street's" debut.²⁷ Cooney recalled that it was the time that Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were shot.²⁸ While at one of the seminars, Cooney became uncomfortable when she saw a man arrive "dressed in what appeared to me to be hippie clothes with a hippie beard." The man sat completely stiff in the last row, away from others, and stared ahead. Cooney turned to Morrisett and asked, "How do we know that man isn't going to kill us?" He responded, "It isn't very likely. That's Jim Henson."²⁹

Henson was hesitant about accepting Cooney's offer to create Muppets that would teach children until she mentioned that adults also would be interested in the program because of special guests and adult humor. The Muppets would join four hosts in a gender-diverse community of blacks, whites and Hispanics.³⁰ Henson signed on and began creating some of "Sesame Street's" characters with which children could identify, such as "Bert," a gullible but honest pessimist, and "Ernie," a charming but sneaky optimist.³¹ Other Henson characters were "Cookie Monster," for kids who sometimes ate cookies before dinner, "Count von Count," a character who counted everything, "Oscar the Grouch," a trash-can inhabitant who was always in a terrible mood, and "Big Bird," a more than seven-foot tall, three-and-a-half-year-old yellow bird.³²

In addition to Stone's recommendation to hire Henson, he suggested the program's scene resemble an inner-city street. Cooney paled at the suggestion because although the target audience was disadvantaged children, she feared that not everyone would find an urban setting appropriate.³³ Morrisett recalled that the creators realized that in order to have a popular show, the program must appeal to as many kids as possible.³⁴ Cooney later realized that to reach inner-city kids, the program must be something with which urban preschoolers could identify. The scene was designed complete with sidewalks, trees, a newspaper-candy store, a mailbox, a trashcan, a boarded-up excavation site, and a stoop of stairs leading to a brownstone apartment building.³⁵

In June 1969, CTW paid 100 families from inner-city Philadelphia \$100 each to allow their children to watch five of its test shows on closed-circuit television.³⁶ At that time, the program had yet to decide upon a name. The planners used formative research when studying children's reactions to the program, meaning the children's responses dictated material choices.³⁷ What the researchers found was startling: as soon as the Muppets were removed from the picture, children's attention drastically dropped. The show's creators had been advised to separate humans from Muppets so that preschoolers could better differentiate fantasy from reality.³⁸ But as Stone recalled,

We did the test shows that way—no "Oscar," no "Big Bird"—and we realized right away that we had a problem because the people on the street couldn't compete with the puppets. So the information we got from these test shows demonstrated that we needed a transition from the fantasy to the reality and puppets on the street seemed a good way to do it.³⁹

Reader's Digest published a story foreshadowing the educational program's debut that said, "This is one television experiment—the Workshop was formed last spring with impressive financial support from foundations and the federal government—that has the money and will take the time to get ready." The article's author questioned if teachers, producers and a research team could cooperate with educational consultants.⁴⁰

In May, *Newsweek* published an article that asked, "Can these genuinely funny bits and lively, one-minute 'commercials' actually be educational TV? Can they really 'sell' pre-school lessons to the 12 million 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds across the country, but particularly in the ghetto?"⁴¹ Also skeptical was a June 1969 article in *U.S. News and World Report*. "The new shows being developed for the noncommercial networks will be watched closely to see whether they meet this test."⁴² The test was the creation of better kids' television, which according to several Congressmen, was needed to boost funding for further development of educational programming.⁴³

That same month, writer Virginia Schone suggested the show be called "Sesame Street."⁴⁴ "Sesame" was meant to stir up feelings of excitement and adventure associated with the "Arabian Nights" command, "Open sesame," which was the command that opened a magic door to a treasure cave. Creators hoped to open the door to learning for millions of preschoolers. Because it represented a street setting in urban life, "Street" seemed an ideal partner.⁴⁵

The pilot was taped in July 1969 complete with "Big Bird," which was operated by puppeteer Carroll Spinney.⁴⁶ He also supplied the voice and movements for "Oscar the Grouch." Henson performed "Ernie," "Rolf" the piano-playing dog and "Kermit the

Frog." Joe Raposo was the resident composer who wrote "Kermit the Frog's" first song, "It's Not Easy Bein' Green."⁴⁷

The major commercial networks in 1969 were CBS, NBC, and ABC. Other educational programs, both commercial and non-commercial, had varying success—"Mr. I Magination" lost sponsorship, "Ding Dong School" failed, and "Mr. Wizard" was suspended in 1965 after fourteen years. "Captain Kangaroo" was beginning its sixteenth season on CBS, and NET's "Mister Roger's Neighborhood" was criticized for being "too Christian."⁴⁸ Commercial stations experimented with children's programs, too, such as CBS's cartoon "Archie's Funhouse" and NBC's cartoons "H.R. Pufnstuf" and "The Bugaloos."⁴⁹ "Romper Room" was criticized for training kids to be consumers, to which the producer Bert Claster responded, "This is commercial television, isn't it?"⁵⁰

The commercial promotion of "Sesame Street" was rare for a non-commercial program.⁵¹ NBC held a thirty-minute, prime time preview in addition to interviews with Cooney and Palmer. ABC also conducted interviews with Cooney and Palmer, and CBS allowed "Sesame Street" to run commercials free of charge.⁵² Before the show debuted, more than fourteen periodicals published articles.⁵³ Cooney said of the pre-reviews, "I could not have understood what a smash it would be and what that would feel like in terms of the 'swoosh' of press interest, the 'swoosh' of public acclaim, the phone ringing off the wall with every toy maker in the world wanting to buy 'Sesame Street,' I mean, commercial people."⁵⁴

After more than two years of planning, funding and research, "Sesame Street" made its debut on November 10, 1969. The first season, which ran from November 1969 through May 1970, had a budget of \$8 million and produced 130 shows. It aired at least

once a day from 10 a.m. until 11 a.m., five days a week.⁵⁵ The hosts played such roles as a schoolteacher, a wife and a storekeeper. "Big Bird," "Cookie Monster," "Bert" and "Ernie," "Oscar the Grouch," "Kermit the Frog," "Rolf" and "Count von Count" were introduced as main characters to the show.

Regarding the anxiety before the debut and reaction immediately following, Cooney said, "I remember the last days going around like a woman 10 months pregnant. We knew we had a baby, a great baby. You just felt it. . . . It was an overnight success, without a question. . . . It has become a huge part of the culture."⁵⁶ Morrisett said that the staff members tried to get the best possible perception from the media, but the CTW creators did not know if the show would be successful.⁵⁷

Thousands of mail responses flooded CTW headquarters in New York City and thousands more gave feedback via letters or phone calls to various broadcasting outlets. A Boston station reported receiving 13,000 calls and 7,000 letters of appreciation.⁵⁸ A New York City station received so much fan mail that "Sesame Street" started airing six times a day. President Nixon even wrote a fan letter.⁵⁹

"Sesame Street" had its share of skeptics and suspicious adults. A reporter for *Time*, four days after "Sesame Street's" debut, stated, "Some [techniques] are based on a sort of psychedelic flash card system that assaults young minds with a pleasant barrage of sights, sounds and colors repeated over and over. . . . Muppets, ingenious hand puppets with all the comfortable soft sell of a favorite doll, talk about ideas."⁶⁰ Morrisett said that the show's editing was the primary criticism from traditional educators. "In the beginning, the initial criticisms, I think, were that the show was too fast-paced and might lead kids to hyperactive behavior. But our research indicated that wasn't true."⁶¹

In praise of the new program was an article by *The Saturday Review*. Five days after the debut, the magazine wrote,

The product of a happy collaboration of leading educators, child-development specialists, psychologists, school teachers, film-makers, writers and artists, "Sesame Street" is a delightful, fast-paced variety show whose quality of humor, intelligence and artistry will make many an adult envious "Sesame Street" has become not only a major experiment in truly educational television, but the nation's first experiment in truly public television as well.⁶²

A *Today's Health* article in November reported that teenagers, adults without children and parents were all intrigued by the show.⁶³ A January 1970 article in *Ebony* applauded the diversity both onscreen and behind the scenes, citing black staff members such as cartoonist Tee Collins, actress Loretta Long, actor Matt Robinson and producer Lutrelle Horne. The article detailed areas of concern to Robinson, who played "Gordon" on the show. He said, "These kids need less fantasy and . . . more realism in black-oriented problems." He believed the show was too diluted by attempting to reach every preschooler.⁶⁴ Morrisett responded that the show decided to teach standard English instead of "Black English," which led to criticisms that the program was racist and oppressive. On the other hand, he also recalled that some people thought that "Sesame Street" was too black because it was set in an urban area and employed a diverse cast.⁶⁵

In February 1970, a reporter for the *Saturday Review* criticized the program, stating, "Middle age usually represents maturity, yet I have often wondered whether 'Sesame Street' is still in a preschool age itself." He expressed concern that fantasy and reality were already mixed up in a child's head and advised "Sesame Street" to aim its program to eight- to thirteen-year-old kids who already differentiated fantasy and reality.⁶⁶

Regardless of its critics, "Sesame Street" managed to draw 6 million children to the show, which was the highest audience rating of any NET production.⁶⁷ In April, CTW broke its relationship with NET and expanded its media to include comic books, records, educational games and toys.⁶⁸ It became an independent, non-profit corporation and elected its own board of trustees, headed by Morrisett as chairman, in order to mandate the widest possible audience.⁶⁹ Morrisett said CTW was a seed program that was funded with the intent that after a few years, PBS would stand on its own. Suzanne Roberts, director of Outreach children's programming at Ohio University, stated, "It was a non-profit organization, and it didn't get millions of dollars in commercial advertising."⁷⁰

"Sesame Street" affected governmental support of educational programming. In that same April, FCC Chairman Dean Burch heard of ACT's mission to get commercial stations committed to improving educational television. He told the National Association of Broadcasters to consider themselves responsible for bringing kids "healthy entertainment and healthy learning."⁷¹

Commercial stations were already responding. CBS created 130 mini-documentaries in addition to its expensive "Children's Playhouse" and "Captain Kangaroo." ABC took action by releasing "Curiosity Shop," a one-hour program exploring mechanical and natural phenomena, in addition to its already produced "Discovery Series," which was in its ninth year. NBC released "H.R. Pufnstuf," using actors instead of cartoons, in addition to "American Rainbow," which was a series of hour-long dramas. It also was running "Goggles," a program that explored color, and "Hot Dog," a series that demonstrated how things were created.⁷²

But at least for its second season, CTW did not have to worry about financial support. Carnegie, Ford and the U.S. Department of Education combined with several private contributions to provide \$6 million for "Sesame Street's" second season, which began on October 19, 1970.⁷³ Earlier that year, CTW established a products group called the Nonbroadcast Materials Division, which licensed books, records, clothes, dolls, school supplies and developmental toys based on "Sesame Street." The profits were solely used for continued production of the series.⁷⁴

A *Newsweek* article commented on CTW's separation from NET and then stated, "It's already apparent that the widely-acclaimed program for preschool children is not only an interesting experiment in educational television, but a rousing popular hit."⁷⁵

Another *Newsweek* article read,

For the first time in memory, the television season's most talked about success is not a new variety act or situation comedy, but, of all things, an educational program for children. The show's popularity has shaken stereotypes in the ratings conscious world of commercial television and its fresh, witty and exhilarating approach to learning has moved many educators to take a second look at the creative powers of electronic communication.⁷⁶

By the end of the first season in May 1970, "Sesame Street" had won an Emmy for excellence in children's programming and a Peabody Award for the best children's show.⁷⁷ Twenty-six countries had picked up the program in addition to it being carried on 207 stations in America.⁷⁸

The show had its critics, though. An anonymous writer for *New Republic* wrote a highly critical review of "Sesame Street" in June 1970. He pointed out that many first grade teachers found that kids who have the hardest time reading did not make connections between learning the alphabet and reading. In addition, the author stated that

"Sesame Street" did not account for the fact that many kids did not succeed in reading because they may be tired, hungry or frightened. The author continued that it taught in a passive and sedentary way, it did not teach kids new material but rather how to categorize old material, and it did not allow for adults to take cues from kids like good teachers took from their classes. Sedulus said,

Some kind of physical or 'movement' education on 'Sesame Street' would be a welcome relief, perk the kids up, and cultivate their formidable talents for physical awareness and self-expression Nobody on 'Sesame Street' is ever miserable, terrified or exultant. Problems cure themselves. 'Sesame Street' doesn't provoke real emotions . . . and a good example is their circulating literature, which is bland beyond description. The lions in the stories 'Gordon' reads are the sort that go to barbershops and eat cake at birthday parties, not the kind that eat up little girls.⁷⁹

The next issue of *New Republic* published six responses to the anonymous author's critique. Two responses were offended by Sedulus's remarks. Martin Mayor of New York City wrote, "It is bad enough to read an ignorant attack on 'Sesame Street' in the pages of *NR*. To find that the attack has been made pseudonymously is infuriating." Judith A. Cohen of Ann Arbor, Michigan, wrote, "Perhaps children need more physical activity, but we should not expect this of TV."⁸⁰

Four other responses were in agreement with Sedulus' criticisms. Grayce Scholt of Flint, Michigan, agreed with the original author, and wrote, "['Sesame Street' is] perhaps one cut above the old 'Romper Room' of some time back, but only one." Ada Rose of Flaverford, Pennsylvania, said, "Your critical appraisal of 'Sesame Street' is a welcome change from the blindly enthusiastic response accorded an admirable effort. . . . One of the things that probably is wrong with 'Sesame Street' is the pace ('always fast-paced and bouncy')—which is practically subliminal in technique, and enough to drive a

kid out of his mind eventually.”⁸¹ “That was easily the best review of ‘Sesame Street’ I’ve seen,” wrote Jeannete Veatch, a professor of education at Arizona State University. “Thank you and congratulations for your excellent article on ‘Sesame Street,’ which says better than anything else I have seen what is so wrong about that very entertaining program,” wrote John Holt from Boston.⁸²

About the same time in the early 1970s, local stations in the public broadcasting system were growing increasingly apprehensive of CPB’s overseeing role, fearful that it was becoming too powerful in controlling programs.⁸³ In early June 1970, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was created so local stations could choose nationally produced programs. It established its own formal journalistic standards and guidelines separate from those of its supervisor, the CPB.⁸⁴

“Sesame Street” inspired independent media organizations as well. As *Today’s Health* noted, “Major networks, even educators themselves, are now developing programs designed to improve the minds of youngsters.” A Bloomington, Indiana group called the National Instructional Television Center created “Ripples,” which was a series of fifteen-minute educational segments for both classroom use and public broadcasting channels.⁸⁵ Another example was “Metooshow,” a Chicago-based production by the Erikson Institute for Early Education aimed at stimulating adult-child activities.⁸⁶

However, Maria Piers, dean of the Erikson Institute, criticized “Sesame Street” for being shallow, stating, “Television is an excellent tool for education, not a substitute for live people.”⁸⁷ Her program, “Metooshow,” was concerned with adult-child interactions. Robert Gilstrap, a National Education Association administrator, agreed with Piers, stating that television did not teach without adult reinforcement.⁸⁸

Morrisett recalled that an implicit criticism was that the show would lead kids to be unresponsive in school. “There was a criticism that we were teaching kids things they would have learned in school,” he said. “I think that criticism usually came from traditional educators.” He noted that CTW’s research proved the opposite—kids were generally more responsive and motivated when beginning school following the advent of “Sesame Street.”⁸⁹ Roberts stated, “Those who opposed it had to remember that it wasn’t for adults. ‘Sesame Street’ was real sensitive to kids. Adults who didn’t like it couldn’t relate to it. That’s why kids bought into it, but adults didn’t.”⁹⁰

Cooney responded to those critics who said that the show used too many complicated symbols by noting that most three year olds were already television addicts and had been exposed to more complex ideas.⁹¹ She responded to criticisms that “Sesame Street” was a “switched-on school” aiming to replace teachers by saying that the instructional program was never intended to replace real experience.⁹²

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a professor of psychology at Cornell University, was quoted in *Time* as saying, “The children [on the show] are charming. Among the adults, there are no cross words, no conflicts, no difficulties, nor for that matter, any obligations or visible attachments. The old, the ugly or the unwanted is simply made to disappear through a manhole.”⁹³ Cooney somewhat agreed with this argument, admitting that the CTW had erred during the first season by underestimating preschoolers’ intelligence.⁹⁴ To combat this and other public criticisms, the second season expanded the number counting above ten, hired a Hispanic actress, incorporated both English and Spanish words, and tackled reasoning and problem solving.⁹⁵ In addition, Cooney admitted that the first season presented kids as being too manipulated because the program was tightly

run, so the second season allowed freer dialogue between adults, Muppets and children. CTW also added more ethnic characters, Muppets, and female writers.⁹⁶

Morrisett said that the transition of introducing more female Muppets and writers was slow-going because of the orientation of the writers and puppet designers. "If we'd always had a male club and someone asks us to put more women in it, the change had to be gradual," he said.⁹⁷ The 1970-1971 season would be the first to take "Sesame Street" overseas under the direction of Michael H. Dann, vice president and assistant to the president for CTW. The second season included 150 shows instead of 130, and ran on a budget of \$6 million.⁹⁸

A Neilson survey in 1970 estimated that "Sesame Street" had consistently reached 7 million three- to five-year-old kids.⁹⁹ The Educational Testing Service (ETS) of New Jersey was hired to conduct a national study, which was funded by CBS, to determine the show's effectiveness in reaching its goals. ETS returned in November 1970 with a report card that gave the program "All A's" for achieving each of its predetermined goals. Cooney responded, "We placed our bets and we won. I hope that the word keeps spreading to mothers in the inner city. The study has vindicated TV—it can teach and teach well."¹⁰⁰

The achieved goals included recognition of numbers one through ten and simple counting abilities, recognition of the letters of the alphabet and the sounds most commonly associated with them, the concepts of space and time, beginning logical concepts, the maturity of reasoning abilities, and the beginning awareness of basic emotions as a step toward mastering them.¹⁰¹

As the second season began in October 1970, *Time* wrote, "For openers, the Street looks as if a toy truck had overturned in Harlem. The place is in the unavoidable present; the clothing of the cast is well worn, the umber colors and grit of inner-city life are vital components of the show."¹⁰² The article continued,

By now, even the most cynical promoters have begun to realize that 'Sesame Street' is no fluke and that it is excellent in even its own right, but merely relative to the rest of the junior TV scene. In its new series, just begun, the program proves that it is not only the best children's show in TV history; it is one of the best parents' shows as well.¹⁰³

Cooney submitted her final report of the first year of "Sesame Street" to the CTW Board of Trustees in December 1970. She noted that CTW was still an experiment that allowed for constant revision, evaluation and planning.¹⁰⁴ Not only did the series appear internationally, but it performed on commercial television as well. "Sesame Street" characters appeared on "The Flip Wilson Show," a Goldie Hawn special called "Pure Goldie," "Tom Jones...at Fantasy Fair" and a Dick Cavett special. In addition, the Muppets were featured in "Nancy Sinatra's Las Vegas Nightclub Act and Television Special." "Kermit the Frog," Henson's green creation that played a reporter, appeared several times on NBC's "Today Show."¹⁰⁵

Stone recalled that when kids visited the studio, they were instantly pulled to the Muppets, not the puppeteers or surrounding television monitors on which the puppeteers could watch their puppets' movements onscreen. Stone said that his stepfather was a pediatrician who found that after a few months of "Sesame Street," kids who were non-communicative with parents and siblings suddenly opened up to the puppets on TV. Therapists nationwide started using such puppets with autistic children.¹⁰⁶ "I think there

was a kind of collective genius about the core group that created 'Sesame Street,'" Cooney stated. "But there was only one real genius in our midst, and that was Jim [Henson]." ¹⁰⁷ Stone admitted that he directed Muppet-only segments free of charge for "Sesame Street" just to be a part of "the exciting process." ¹⁰⁸

By the end of the second season in 1971, the Muppets had won three Emmy awards for individual achievement in children's educational programming and "Sesame Street" had been awarded two dozen other prizes for excellence in addition to four more Emmy's and another Peabody Award. ¹⁰⁹ In that same year, the Muppets appeared on the "Perry Como Christmas Show."

The government simultaneously was working to help aid noncommercial programming development. During the CPB's third full year of operation in 1971, the corporation grew—the total number of stations carrying "Sesame Street" was 207—with the additional stations, another 7.9 million potential viewers had access to public broadcast programming. ¹¹⁰ The federal government increased funding to the CPB by \$14 million, and the number of black homeowners who said they watched local public television increased from 35 percent in 1970 to 52 percent in 1971. Audience research also showed that the number of people watching public television each week jumped more than 600 percent, from 6 million viewers each week to 39 million. ¹¹¹

Special guests were not only attracting adults. Children were responsive to their presence as well. An article in *The New Yorker* said "Sesame Street" had a type of unusual, but useful intelligence. The article praised "Sesame Street" for allowing Jesse Jackson to sit on the stoop during the third season and commended the creators for their wise selection of special guests. ¹¹² "Sesame Street'...with lapses, [is] the most

intelligent and important program in television," the author wrote. She noted that Muppets were known to ask for a handshake by saying, "Gimme some fur," similar to, "Give me some skin," which was a common expression in black culture.¹¹³

James Earl Jones appeared on an episode and read the alphabet while staring straight into the camera. He took almost two minutes to transition from "A" to "Z." As Roberts explained, "[The producers] had a response time for TV that was a real key. Instead of a 30-second alphabet, you had James Earl Jones giving it a full two minutes, and kids were screaming the letters during his pauses, unable to bear the anticipation for the next letter in line."¹¹⁴

Not everyone easily accepted "Sesame Street's" diverse cast. The CTW had seventeen, full-time community groups working with parents, teen-agers, and teachers. Paul Elkins was Appalachia's organizer based in the Clinch Valley of St. Paul, Virginia. As a *New Yorker* article illustrated, he often had to reassure community members that the proliferation of black people on "Sesame Street" did not mean that the program was communist.¹¹⁵

In attempting to define both organizations duties in respect to each other, CPB and PBS ran into roadblocks and could not agree on public television's duties and course of action. Finally, on June 30, 1972, President Nixon got involved. He vetoed a bill from CPB, stating that CPB was becoming "the center of power and the focal point of control for the entire public broadcasting system."¹¹⁶

Following Nixon's veto, the majority of chairmen for CPB resigned, and Henry Loomis was named the new president. PBS was allowed to retain more control over programming choices under a resolution passed by Loomis in late 1972.¹¹⁷ CPB and PBS

worked together to formulate a Nixon-approved plan that provided individual stations money to find sponsors that would underwrite national programs. Most of the national funds came from increased Congressional appropriation—an increase of \$15 million was budgeted for the first year of the program—and was distributed proportionately among the 207 stations in the system.¹¹⁸ These funds gave stations buying power for the kinds of national programs each desired.

In that same June, "Sesame Street" was available in fifty countries.¹¹⁹ Also in 1972, the Ford Foundation granted \$6 million to be distributed to CTW over a seven-year span. The monetary award was to help CTW support itself while searching for other means of financial backing.¹²⁰

Regardless of differences in opinions, "Sesame Street" continued to be groundbreaking in its unique approach to educational television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the time, a blended cast of males, females, blacks, whites and Hispanics was rare.¹²¹ The show resembled a magazine-type format that used puppets, animated and live actions segments to educate children. It also incorporated a fast-pace and used commercial briefs that resembled slogans. It was not uncommon to hear, "'Sesame Street' was brought to you by the letter 'W' and the number '3.'" ¹²²

Cooney, in an annual report opening statement, wrote,

Few of us at the Workshop consider "Sesame Street" a complete success because, quite frankly, the series simply has not had the impact on children's television that we had anticipated. We had hoped that the commercial networks would develop more age-specific shows and find a way to broadcast more weekday programs for children.¹²³

Cooney, Morrisett and the other creators behind "Sesame Street" were pioneers of educational television by using entertainment to attract children to learning. No other

non-commercial, educational program prior to "Sesame Street" prepared two years in advance using formative research, nor did any secure funding comparable to the contributions of the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and other private sponsors that "Sesame Street" secured. No other educational program on a non-commercial station received so much attention from commercial outlets, the media and the government.

At the end of the 1971-1972 season, which was "Sesame Street's" third year on the air, the program's creators, writers, producers, educators, consultants and audience members continued working together to provide more opportunities for all children to access the educational resource. Opponents had voiced their opinions of "Sesame Street," but the program maintained operation with generous funding, contributions and governmental support, and the general public purchased the organization's merchandise, all of which helped to maintain "Sesame Street's" production. It prompted national attention that extended beyond television into print, politics and the public.

- Notes -

1. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," *Time*, November 23, 1970, 68 and www.snopes2.com/radiotv/radio/uncledon.htm. "Uncle Don" was really Howard Rice, born 1897 in St. Joseph, Michigan. He changed his name at fifteen to Don Carney while performing in Vaudeville. In September 1928 he debuted as "Uncle Don" on a New York radio's children's program that aired six nights a week from 1928 through 1947. The earliest account of his on-air flub came in a *Variety* article dated April 23, 1930. Whether or not the rumor was true, "Uncle Don's" reputation was tarnished but he never lost his job—he retired in 1947.
2. Evan McLeod Wylie, "'Sesame Street' Opens the Door," *Reader's Digest*, May 1970, 112.
3. "TV's Switched-on School," *Newsweek*, June 1, 1970, 71. ACT challenged commercial networks with three demands: offer at least fourteen hours of children's television each week, cut sponsorships and commercials, and delete performers' product mentions.
4. Daniel W. Kratochival, "'Sesame Street:' Developed by Children's Workshop," for American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, December 1971, 9.
5. *Ibid.*, 9.
6. Richard M. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television Workshop* (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 2.
7. *Ibid.*, 10, 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 39.
9. "TV's switched-on School," *Newsweek*, 69.
10. Harry Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street,'" *A&E*, March 18, 2001.
11. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television Workshop*, 22. The study pushed the educational project forward and proposed that television could have influence as an educational tool.
12. John Witherspoon and Roselle Kovitz, *A History of Public Broadcasting*, (Public Telecommunications Newspaper: Washington, D.C., 1987), 49.
13. *Ibid.*, 50 and Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview with author, March 2, 2002.
14. *Ibid.*, 51.
15. Christopher Finch, *Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination* (NY: Random House, 1993), 55.
16. *Ibid.*, 56.
17. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television Workshop*, 39.
18. *Ibid.*, 41-42.
19. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
20. *Ibid.*, 64.
21. *Ibid.*, 3.
22. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.
23. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television Workshop*, 68.
24. Kratochival, "'Sesame Street:' Developed by Children's Workshop," 22.
25. Finch, *Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 53.

26. Ibid., 53-54. Stone felt so strongly about getting Henson and his Muppets to perform on "Sesame Street" that he told Cooney without Henson, the show would have to go on without any puppets at all. Cooney had seen some of Henson's work and, although she had never met him, felt that Henson was a creative genius.

27. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television Workshop*, 72.

28. Finch, *Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 54.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 55.

31. Geraldine Woods, *Jim Henson, From Puppets to Muppets*, (MN: Dillon Press, 1987), 31.

32. Ibid. and Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street.'" Henson wanted to create characters in which children could identify. Cooney agreed that Henson's goal was a good one, and asked writers to develop scripts in which Bert and Ernie quarrel but value their friendship and Cookie Monster gets caught with his paw in the cookie jar. The creators hoped balancing good and bad would create an air of reality. Henson had constructed a formula of presentation that was new to the televised puppetry field—performers placed their hands inside a Muppet's head to create facial expressions while simultaneously moving the Muppet's arms using thin rods attached to each of the Muppet's hands. Some of the puppets were created to accommodate human hands inserted into the puppets' arms to operate the fingers, instead of using the traditional rods. The performers held the puppets above their heads with one arm and operated the rods, or hands depending on the puppet, with their other arm. The camera then shot above the Muppets' waists. Television monitors were situated on the ground for puppeteers' to see how their actions appeared onscreen.

33. Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street.'"

34. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.

35. Wylie, "'Sesame Street' Opens the Door," 115.

36. Joan Ganz Cooney, "Sesame Street at Five; The Changing Look of a Perpetual Experiment," for *Children's Television Workshop*, NY, October 1974, 32.

37. Shalom M. Fisch, "The Children's Television Workshop: the Experiment Continues," in *A Communications Cornucopia*, Roger G. Noll and Monroe E. Price, eds., (DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 300.

38. Finch, *Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 71.

39. Ibid.

40. Wylie, "'Sesame Street' Opens the Door," 115.

41. "Open Sesame," *Newsweek*, May 26, 1969, 81.

42. "Educational TV—A Progress Report," *U.S. News and World Report*, June, 9, 1969, 46.

43. Ibid.

44. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' Origins of the Children's Television Workshop*, 90.

45. Ibid.

46. Woods, *Jim Henson From Puppets to Muppets*, 30 and Finch, *Jim Henson, the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 54.

47. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' Origins of the Children's Television*

Workshop, 90 and Finch, *Jim Henson: the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 244 and *Ibid.* 58 and *Ibid.* 55. Before the song's debut, Raposo stated, "I want to describe the promise of every morning and the curiosity and hope on every child's face. I would like to think that this theme of hope and wonder is at the root of all my work." "Kermit the Frog," got his name from one of Henson's childhood friends Kermit Scott, who was a classmate in Henson's class in Leland, Mississippi. Kermit was a regular on each show during the first three seasons. He played a reporter and introduced himself as "Kermit the Frog of 'Sesame Street' News." Other main operators included Jerry Nelson performing "Count von Count," and Frank Oz performing "Bert." Don Sahlin was a Muppets Inc. veteran designer who supplied puppeteers with a variety of characters with the help of artist Caroly Wilcox.

48. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 68.
49. *Ibid.*, 69.
50. *Ibid.*, 69.
51. Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street.'"
52. Kratochival, "'Sesame Street:' Developed by Children's Workshop," 13.
53. *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, 1969, 1,169.
54. Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street.'" A sweep of advanced publicity came in the form of major newspapers, magazines, journals and radio plugs. Word spread that November 10, 1969 would bring an unprecedented children's program to the airwaves.
55. Kratochival, "'Sesame Street:' Developed by Children's Workshop," 13.
56. Smith, "Biography Close-up: 'Sesame Street.'"
57. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.
58. Alan Rosenthal, "The 'Sesame Street' Generation Arrives," *Today's Health*, December 1970, 45.
59. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 60.
60. "The Forgotten 12 Million," 96.
61. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.
62. B.B.S., "'Sesame Street' Opens," *Saturday Review*, November 15, 1969, 91. He continued by criticizing "Sesame Street" for not addressing people's emotional lives, citing that cognitive confidence will not help relieve social and personal ills associated with established roots and attitudes.
63. Byron Scott, "Turning on Tots with Educational TV," *Today's Health*, November 1969, 62.
64. "A Toddle Down 'Sesame Street,'" *Ebony*, January 1970, 36-39. Robinson felt that black kids would benefit if black characters encouraged them to identify.
65. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.
66. Robert Lewis Shayon, "Cutting Oedipal Ties," *Saturday Review*, February 14, 1970, 50.
67. Wylie, "'Sesame Street' Opens the Door," 116. He continued by criticizing "Sesame Street" for not addressing people's emotional lives, citing that cognitive confidence will not help relieve social and personal ills associated with established roots and attitudes.
68. "'Sesame' Opens Up," *Newsweek*, April 20, 1972, 102. It was able to create

basic contracts and television unions, talent, film producers and broadcast groups internationally.

69. Kratochival, "'Sesame Street:' Developed by Children's Workshop." 14. CTW hoped to place "Sesame Street" on commercial TV to help accommodate a larger segment of society. CTW was also able to contract with commercial firms that wanted to create materials for CTW programming.

70. Fisch, "The Children's Television Workshop: the Experiment Continues," 311. and Suzanne Roberts, personal interview with author, February 6, 2002.

71. "TV's Switched-on School," 71.

72. Ibid. NBC's Vice President of Children's Programming, George Heinemann, said that "Sesame Street" did not pose a threat to NBC, but that the program came along at an opportune time.

73. Little, "From A to Z on 'Sesame Street,'" 62.

74. Fisch, "The Children's Television Workshop: the Experiment Continues," 316. That same year, the first "Sesame Street" album and original cast albums were released.

75. "'Sesame' Opens Up," *Newsweek*, April 20, 1970, 102.

76. "TV's Switched-on School," 69.

77. Ibid., 68.

78. Joan Ganz Cooney, "The First Year of 'Sesame Street:' A History and Overview, Final Report, Volume I of V volumes," for Children's Television Workshop, New York, 1970, 1 and Little, "From A to Z on 'Sesame Street,'" 63.

79. Sedulus, "'Sesame Street,'" *New Republic*, June 1970, 23-28.

80. Letters to the Editors, "Correspondence: 'Sesame Street,'" *New Republic*, 27 June 1970, 30.

81. Ibid., 31.

82. Ibid., 32.

83. Witherspoon and Kovitz, *A History of Public Broadcasting*, 43.

84. Ibid.

85. Rosenthal, "The 'Sesame Street' Generation Arrives," 65.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.

90. Suzanne Roberts, personal interview, February 6, 2002.

91. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 66.

92. Little, "From A to Z on 'Sesame Street,'" 62.

93. Rosenthal, "The 'Sesame Street' Generation Arrives," 65.

94. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 66. Cooney said that a big, cold box can't replace a loving teacher who cares about a child.

95. "Sesame at One," *Newsweek*, November 16, 1970, 76.

96. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 66.

97. Lloyd Morrisett, telephone interview, March 2, 2002.

98. Rosenthal, "The 'Sesame Street' Generation Arrives," 45.

99. "TV's Switched-on School," 69.

100. "'Sesame Street' Report Card," *Time*, November 16, 1970, 70.

101. Polsky, *Getting to 'Sesame Street,' the Origins of the Children's Television*

Workshop, 42.

102. "Who's Afraid of Big, Bad TV?," 60. The magazine devoted a cover story of "Big Bird" with nine pages and color photographs inside.

103. Ibid.

104. Cooney, "The First Year of Sesame Street: A History and Overview. Final Report, Volume I of V volumes," 3.

105. Finch, *Jim Henson the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*, 244.

106. Ibid., 74.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., 59.

109. Cooney, "The First Year of Sesame Street: A History and Overview. Final Report, Volume I of V volumes," 8.

110. Corporation for Public Broadcasting Annual Report, Washington, 1971, 41.

111. Ibid., 26.

112. Renata Adler, "The Air," *New Yorker*, June 3, 1972, 95.

113. Ibid., 92-95.

114. Interview, Suzanne Roberts, February 6, 2002.

115. Adler, "The Air," 100. Shortly after addressing the concerns, Elkins changed the subject.

116. Witherspoon and Kovitz, *A History of Public Broadcasting*, 49.

117. Ibid., 32. Those stations provided the essential financial backing for national productions to continue developing educational programming.

118. Ibid.

119. Adler, "The Air," 96.

120. Witherspoon and Kovitz, *A History of Public Broadcasting*, 49.

121. Fisch, "The Children's TV Workshop: The Experiment Continues," 300.

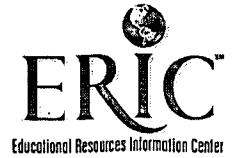
122. Ibid.

123. Joan Ganz Cooney, "'Sesame Street' at Five: The Changing Look of a Perpetual Experiment," for Children's Television Workshop, New York, October 1974, 1.

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