

**The Chicago Experiment -
Journalist Attitudes and
The Ten O'Clock News:
*Reported by Carol Marin***

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ABSTRACT

PETER A. CASELLA: The Chicago Experiment – Journalist Attitudes and
The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin
(Under the direction of C.A. Tuggle, PhD)

WBBM-TV, the CBS owned-and-operated television station in Chicago, embarked on what was called a “noble experiment” in television journalism in February 2000. *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was a return to traditional, normative television journalism. The program, with respected journalist Carol Marin as the only anchor, was an attempt by station management to revive the moribund ratings of the late news broadcast with traditional hard news. Station management promised to stick with the new format for at least one year. Nine month later, amid even lower ratings, a new management team cancelled the experiment. This is the first academic investigation of that initiative. This qualitative study utilized data generated from long interviews with five principals of the news program. The findings provided great insight into the philosophies and attitudes that shaped the broadcast, and revealed some of the things that caused the program’s demise. They also revealed a clear and definite attitude of antagonism that varied according to job responsibilities and position in the editorial hierarchy. These negative attitudes are reflections of the dialectic between the trusteeship model and the market-driven model of broadcasting. This study is a grounded theory investigation from which emerged the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model of electronic journalism. The model illustrates how overt awareness by journalists of a

media company's legitimate pursuit of profits could enhance the editorial quality and audience appeal of its news product.

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Chapter I

Introduction

EXAMINING TELEVISION JOURNALISM

What if every day we had a group of really strong journalists who had been there a long time ... what if we put those people in a room every day and instead of having a regular meeting we talked and argued over what was a really important story and whatever was important go and cover that like crazy?"

Hank Price – Television executive

Television is the most influential source of all public affairs programming. More specifically, local television news is the main source of information for many Americans (Rosenstiel, 2007). Studies by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2004) found that Americans depend more on local television news than any other news source, and that local news commands a larger audience than cable or network television news. A study commissioned by the Radio-Television News Directors Association (Papper, 2007) indicates that Americans have a huge appetite for news and information, and that 65.5 percent of the audience sates that appetite by way of local television news.

With television's great audience comes great responsibility. An independent press as envisioned by political theorists John Locke and Thomas Jefferson was essential to guarantee free and open debate in a marketplace of ideas (Gardner *et al.*, 2001). This was the basis for endowing the commercial press – or as it has evolved, “the media” – as the only private enterprise specifically guaranteed constitutional protection.

In the past generation, two forces – technology and economics – have simultaneously caused an evolution in this marketplace of ideas. The combination of media consolidation and expanding technology continues to alter the information landscape in ways the Founding Fathers could never have envisioned. Consequently, a scholarly examination of the social function of the media is warranted in this era of rapid change.

Any in-depth examination of journalism should necessarily be based on its theoretical underpinnings in a free and democratic society – this Jeffersonian theory of social responsibility for the purpose of creating a public marketplace of ideas from which citizens can engage in the process of self-government from an informed perspective. Such an unintimidated and unregulated press would also serve as an early warning system for a democracy (Cronkite, 1996). In this light, any study of American journalism should include a definition that reflects its critical societal function. For the purpose of this investigation, this concept of journalism will be defined as the presentation of events, ideas and issues as part of the public discourse for the predominant purpose of contributing to self-governance. This concept of journalism will be termed “traditional, normative journalism.” Traditional normative journalism might be considered quality journalism.

Normative Journalism

The Project for Excellence in Journalism, in what it calls the most extensive study ever conducted about local television news, identified eight characteristics of quality viewers expect local television news organizations to achieve. Those characteristics are –

1. Make the news local
2. Cover the whole community
3. Present significant and substantive stories
4. Demonstrate enterprise and courage
5. Produce fair, balanced, and accurate stories
6. Be authoritative
7. Employ high standards of presentation
8. Avoid sensationalism (Rosenstiel, 2007).

Postman and Powers (1992) believe normative journalism is a shared responsibility. They argue viewers of television news accept a measure of responsibility in fulfilling the normative journalistic process by selecting broadcasts that “express their social and political, not to mention spiritual, values” (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 75). A study by David Mindich (2005), however, found that Americans age 18-34 pay more attention to *American Idol* than to news programming, 80 percent of them do not read newspapers and few watch news on television. Mindich says this process began in the 1960s as television was coming of age. “Our citizens are uninformed about general news and deprived of the means to discuss their opinions of it with friends, family, and coworkers” (Mindich, 2005, p. 12). He identifies five possible reasons for the trend, two of which are directly attributed to the media. Mindich asserts this development has left 20- and 30-year-olds largely unprepared to begin asserting societal leadership roles because they are so uninformed. “Unless something breaks this cycle, the death of aging news consumers will mark a profound change in the social and political landscape of America’s future” (Mindich, 2005).

The purpose of this study is not to explore the public's responsibility in the information process, but that of the media, specifically television news. The current model of television news is, quite simply, in crisis. Expanding communications technology has dramatically expanded the number of media outlets. These media outlets are all attempting to survive in a universe of finite economic resources. The resulting competition for audience attention has blurred the once-bright line between entertainment and news. Predictions of dire consequences are frequent. Former vice president Al Gore, for example, believes the very foundation of democracy is at risk:

There should be a distinction between news and entertainment. It really matters. The subjugation of news by entertainment seriously harms our democracy: It leads to dysfunctional journalism that fails to inform the people. And when the people are not informed, they cannot hold the government accountable when it is incompetent, corrupt, or both (Gore, 2007, p. 17)

Many journalists themselves, especially those who entered the profession for the very purpose of serving the media's social responsibility function, share this observation. The alarm might be most pronounced in those veteran journalists who entered the broadcast news industry when corporate economic pressure was not as great. It might also be aggravated in editorial employees who view themselves as "purists," as reflected in the comments made to this study's author by one veteran, award-winning journalist who is no longer working in the news business.

I'm far too black and white and not nearly enough gray. But that having been said, once I drank the Kool-Aid, once I started carrying copy around

that network newsroom, it was about news. And I hate the bastards that have turned it into what it's become at the local level (P. A. Casella, 2005).

Many such veteran broadcast journalists have left the industry – voluntarily or otherwise – depriving their younger successors of their experience and perspective, further weakening contemporary ties to traditional values.

A Unique Opportunity

In 2000, a group of local television journalists at WBBM-TV in Chicago had the unique opportunity to combat this trend of softer news and produce a nightly newscast of traditional, normative values. The reason was economic. The ratings for the station's news programming were terrible. Experiments with various formats were all unsuccessful. As a last resort, the general manager suggested a return to traditional, hard news and promised to support the initiative for at least one year. Eight months later, amid even lower ratings, a new management team cancelled the broadcast. This purpose of this study is to uncover reasons for the failure so those lessons learned will be available for those engaged in possible future attempts to produce a traditional, normative news product.

The program caught the attention of the industry. It was seen as a source of hope for journalists who still had faith in a return to solid, responsible journalism. Because the program was a blueprint for a possible new industry model, members of the organization felt a certain responsibility to succeed. This made the news organization's reaction to the decline in ratings especially puzzling. There were none – no substantial attempt to make

any changes, large or small, to achieve economic viability for the program. One observer called the response analogous to the band on the *Titanic* that played on, ignoring the danger as the ship continued to sink.

This study is a qualitative investigation of this news program, *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. This researcher interviewed key members of the editorial staff in an attempt to fully understand the birth and death of this journalistic endeavor that came to be called the “noble experiment.” The findings illuminate an exceptionally dedicated, talented, accomplished, and cohesive group of journalists who continue to see their experience with this program as a highlight of their careers. But the researcher also discovered an organizational mythology that led to a loss of sensemaking and resilience. With the organization’s members unaware of such conditions and, therefore, unable to address them, the experiment was destined to fail. It is the hope of this researcher that the findings of this study will contribute to the success of any future effort to improve the quality of journalism by those who realize the economic imperative they face in the process.

Chapter II

Literature Review and Theory

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL DEFINITIONS OF NEWS

These theories assume the news media will emphasize public affairs coverage, including stories related to government, community, and foreign affairs in an effort to create a “world community by giving men everywhere knowledge of the world and one another.”

Commission on Freedom of the Press – 1947

The media, especially television, has altered its content to attract more viewers. In the corporate mass media, sound bites are shrinking, news is devolving into infotainment, television is re-engineering ‘reality’ as a Darwinian talent show, and investigative reporting is being phased out as unsexy and too expensive.

B.D. Johnson – *Docs Without Borders*

There are two categories in which news can be defined. The first is the theoretical, which uses language to describe concepts and ideas. The second is practical – the overall execution, appearance and effect of the product of the practice of electronic journalism. There is extensive literature examining both definitions of journalism.

Academics might cite the practical to examine the theoretical. They more often, however, attempt to capture the essence of journalism through scholarly observation and interpretation. Pioneer communication researcher Wilbur Schramm, for example, offered an early and simple definition of news as “an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of an event” (Schramm, 1949). Harold Lasswell, as cited by Graber (1980),

described the media in terms of their function, including (1) surveillance of the world to report ongoing events, (2) interpretation of the meaning of events, and (3) socialization of individuals into their cultural settings. G. Stuart Adam, in his later essay “Notes toward a Definition of Journalism” (Adam & Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1993), wrote “Journalism is an invention or a form of expression used to report and comment in the public media on the events and ideas of the here and now.”

The Hutchins Commission, in one of the earliest studies of journalism and its effects on society, defined journalism as a Jeffersonian function through five standards by which a democratic republic should hold the press accountable. Not coincidentally, all five elements of the definition were tied to the practice of journalism.

1. A truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning;
2. A forum for the exchange of comment and criticism;
3. The projection of a representative picture of constituent groups in the society;
4. The presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society;
- and
5. Full access to the day's intelligence (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947).

The practice of journalism, especially electronic journalism, has evolved significantly since this landmark 1947 examination. The reasons for this evolution include technological advances, a greater understanding of the properties of the electronic media, a greater understanding of the effects of electronic media on audiences and society, and

the acceptance of the validity electronic journalism by society and the academic community alike. Academic researchers, in the earliest days of television, did not recognize the new medium as meriting any journalistic status at all. Noelle-Neumann, despite the title of her study “Mass Communications Media,” made a pointed distinction between the print and broadcast media, mentioning “TV programs” and discussing “examples which show that the radio and the press are definitely capable of having an educational effect” (Noelle-Neumann, 1959). Cranston, a year later (1960), traced broadcast coverage of political conventions from 1924. He defined television news operationally as the four existing television networks: ABC, CBS, DuMont and NBC.

Researchers, despite the significance of television in the 1960 presidential campaign in the form of landmark debates, still did not recognize the legitimacy of the medium as a journalistic force. In “The Prestige Press Covers the 1960 Presidential Campaign,” for example, Stempel (1961) makes absolutely no mention of any electronic media, limiting his review to 15 American daily newspapers. Additionally, Higbie cites television only in the context of the debates. He observed that television played a more significant role in 1960 than “a pallid communication role played by TV in previous elections” (Higbie, 1961).

The attitude of academe changed little in the intervening decades. The Vietnam War was called a “television war” because, for the first time, the battlefield was brought directly into American homes on a nightly basis. In “Vietnam: Report Card on the Press Corps at War,” however, Johnson (1969) gives only a passing reference to television, quoting a newspaper columnist’s mention of anchors from the three major U.S. broadcast networks: ABC, CBS and NBC. Many academic studies through the 1980s – such as

Sambe (1980), Singleton and Cook (1982), Williams, Shapiro, *et al.* (1983), Greenberg, Sachsman, *et al.* (1989), and Greenberg and Wartenberg (1990) – also defined television news in terms of the “Big Three,” ABC, CBS and NBC. Many academic studies of network television news through the 1990s and into the new millennium – including Scott and Gobetz (1992), Walters and Hornig (1993), Schleuder, White, *et al.* (1993), Larson (2000), and Van Belle (2000) – reveal the continued trend that researchers limited their definitions through the 20th century to the three traditional broadcast networks.

Cable television journalism, in the form of the Cable News Network and the short-lived Satellite News Channel, began operations in the early 1980s. Academe failed for two decades to recognize these non-traditional sources of electronic news in its operational definitions. Bucy (2003) was one of the first researchers to do so when he used reports from four U.S. networks, including MSNBC, for his effects study examining on-air and online news. Wanta, Golan, *et al.* (2004) included CNN when he defined television news by four national U.S. networks: ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC. And Bae (2000) actually compared the broadcast news networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – with cable news networks – CNN, Fox and MSNBC – in his content analysis “Product Differentiation in National TV Newscasts: A Comparison of the Cable All-News Networks and the Broadcast Networks” (Bae, 2000). Studies that limited their definitions to the traditional three broadcast networks, such as Slattery, Doremus, *et al.* (2001), and Ku, Kaid, *et al.* (2003), did so only because the studies were broadcast network-specific.

A New Reality Reflected

As the new broadcast journalism paradigm matured and diversified, academic researchers increasingly defined the concept by its practical application. Postman and Powers (1992), for example, while conceding “importance is a judgment people make” (p. 14), relied in the most commonsensical definition of news being what is actually aired. This would appear to be a most basic definition – if no news organization recognizes an issue or event by covering it, that issue or event is, by lack of engagement, not “news.” The Project for Excellence in Journalism is a well-respected industry research and watchdog organization that assesses the quality of local television news. Its researchers also identified practical application in developing a standard definition in coding newscasts for assessment. “We stress the basics: A newscast should reflect its entire community, cover a broad range of topics, focus on the significant aspects of stories, be locally relevant, balance stories with multiple points of view, and use authoritative sources” (Rosenstiel, 2007).

As the economic landscape of the broadcast industry began to change in the 1980s, the social responsibility of broadcasters waned, as predicted four decades earlier by the Hutchins Commission report. Academic researchers began recognizing this new reality in their studies, developing a body of literature examining the economic evolution of the electronic communication industry and how it has affected the editorial process. McManus, for example, calling broadcast journalism an “elaborate compromise,” wrote, “news, rather than a ‘reflection of reality’ that its producers have sometimes claimed it to be, becomes a commodity to fit the market demands of a collection of special interests” (McManus, 1994). Hamilton characterized broadcast news as a commodity, much as

furniture, fruit and fuel, shaped by the forces of supply and demand (2004). Definitions reflected, sometimes cynically, the new and increasingly predominant reality of soft news. According to Postman and Powers, “news, we might say, may be history in its first and best form, or the stuff of literature, or the record of the condition of a society, or the expressions of the passions of a public, or the prejudices of journalist ... It may be all of these things but in its worst form it can also be mainly a ‘filler,’ a ‘come-on’ to keep the viewer’s attention until the commercials come” (Postman & Powers, 1992).

That “filler” and those “come-ons” are commonly known by other, more descriptive terms such as soft news, infotainment, and market-centered journalism. This genre was borne of increased competition in the newly-expanded electronic video universe. It was the result of numerous providers competing for the same available pool of advertiser dollars. Researchers began employing the term “soft news” and “infotainment” even though there was no commonly accepted definition (Baum, 2002). Anderson, in her first-person critique of the electronic journalism business, termed infotainment “that amorphous amalgam of news and entertainment in which hooking the viewer with Hollywood-star looks, provocative lead-ins, snappy editing, and sensational, often titillating, stories” (Anderson, 2004). Definitions appeared to become more intricate as the electronic news industry became more diverse. Patterson attempted to define soft news by comparing it to “hard,” or traditional news. “Hard news refers to coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life, such as an earthquake or airline disaster ... Soft news, or ‘infotainment,’ is based increasingly on what will interest an audience rather than on what the audience needs to know ... News that highlights incidents and developments that

have little to do with public affairs and that are selected for their capacity to shock or entertain can distort people's perceptions of reality" (Patterson, 2000).

News programmers, in an attempt to reach larger audiences amid increased competition, began altering content to include material that was deemed more "relevant" (Underwood, 2001). This new media world of convergence was worlds away from the relatively simple journalistic paradigm upon which Schramm based his work. It was not incongruous in such a universe to accept Katz's premise that pop culture – popular movies, television programs, contemporary music, entertainment magazines – had become the new information discourse, the "new news" (Katz, 1992). Former Reagan-Bush press secretary Marlin Fitzwater noted that the new economics of journalism:

turned lawyers into reporters, journalists into entertainers, writers into sloganeers, laymen into cameramen, politicians into pundits and so blurred the profile of journalists that we now turn to Rush Limbaugh, Al Franken and *Hard Copy* for the daily news. They created new business opportunities, giant media conglomerates, mega profits in the communications industry (Fitzwater 1997).

UCLA political scientist and researcher John Zaller, responding to the advent of "softer" news, offered a competing definition of normative journalism. This definition, which he calls the "Burglar Alarm Standard," is borne from the belief that a fully informed citizenry is not necessary for good citizenship. Zaller identified traditional normative journalism as the "Full News Standard," which he defines as news that "should provide citizens with the basic information necessary to form and update opinions on all of the major issues of the day, including the performance of top public officials" (Zaller,

2003, p. 110). The scholar believes this standard is too heavy a burden for contemporary average citizens who, he contends, use news as a form of private entertainment. Zaller, as such, believes viewers, who tend to vote based on partisan political affiliations, are adequately served with a diet of soft news.

Journalists should routinely seek to cover non-emergency but important issues by means of coverage that is intensely focused, dramatic, and entertaining and that affords the parties and responsible interest groups, especially political parties, ample opportunity for expression of opposing views. Reporters may use simulated drama to engage public attention when the real thing is absent (p. 122).

Such soft news coverage that emphasizes drama and controversy rather than serious analysis, Zaller believes, “holds the promise of increasing the number of people involved in the nation’s business (p. 129).

Other scholars were quick to repudiate Zaller. University of Washington political scientist W. Lance Bennett asserts Zaller’s arguments are backward. Bennett claims television news sounds alarms so often, they are regarded as false alarms alerting the public to inconsequential or nonexistent problems. Bennett additionally argues the Burglar Alarm Standard undermines the media’s watchdog function.

Zaller’s implicit hedge against the alarm that does not ring when it should is a presumption that the government functions properly and that officials or civil society groups will be able to sound alarms in the press when it does not. When there are no news alarms, there are no problems. If only

government were so perfect we would scarcely need news at all (Bennett, 2003, p. 132).

Harvard political scientist Thomas Patterson attacks as shaky many of Zaller's assertions. Patterson cites studies that reveal hard news consumers are more numerous than soft news consumers, and that the political party system is becoming less significant in the decision-making process of voters. He believes Zaller's Full News Standard is the social responsibility model of journalism that reasonably demands the press furnish a reasonable quantity and quality of public affairs information. Patterson further asserts viewers watch television news specifically to be informed. "People want to know about consequential developments in their world. Regular consumers find the news entertaining in the sense that they find it interesting enough to follow. But entertainment per se is not their motivation" (Patterson, 2003, p. 140).

This lack of distinction between news and non-news, to some traditionalists, was becoming increasingly untenable (Carpini & Williams, 2001). Baum, however, in a well-reasoned dissent, argued this new soft media definition of journalism was actually beneficial, and deserves scholarly review, because it included in the political discourse individuals not usually disposed to engage in civic matters:

The soft news media have increased many politically inattentive individuals' exposure to information about select high-profile political issues, primarily those involving scandal, violence, heroism, or other forms of human drama. Yet public opinion scholars have largely failed to consider how this might influence public views of politics (Baum, 2002).

Audience Consideration

Many academics and traditional normative journalists tend to skew the journalistic discourse toward the social responsibility model. They see what they do as being solely an important element of the social contract. There has been historically less attention to how and why people actually use media. The Hutchins Commission, for example, was composed almost exclusively of scholars and intellectuals who concentrated their research and recommendations on the civic responsibility of the press. Even McManus' groundbreaking study about market driven journalism (1994) appears to have misinterpreted the reasons for the success of *60 Minutes*. McManus claims the "success of CBS's *60 Minutes* ... demonstrates the interest investigative reporting can generate, particularly if it is suffused with emotional, combative interviews" (p. 115). McManus overlooks, however, the formula of combining serious journalism and pop culture elements within each program. If McManus' conclusion was accurate, it is arguably reasonable to expect other traditional, investigative documentary series to enjoy similar ratings success.

Major audience studies, to be sure, have recently ratified the assumption that there is an audience for normative journalism. The previously mentioned Project for Excellence in Journalism study found that audiences rewarded local newscasts containing better reporting of serious, relevant issues with overall better ratings than news operations investing resources into gratuitous live shots and pre-packages franchises (Rosenstiel, 2007). Papper's (2007) "Future of News" study for the Radio-Television News Directors Foundation additionally found that audiences are exposed to media nearly 70 percent of their waking hours. As audiences are increasingly bombarded with this media glut,

people actively seek out information relevant to them and their lives while unconsciously building defense mechanisms to filter out the rest. It is reasonable to expect, in light of these findings, a market that provides a wide variety of news and information programming. It is unreasonable to expect a normative journalistic standard be applied to all media, or possibly even all elements within each medium offering such as a local television newscast. A major element of commercial success, as illustrated by the example of *60 Minutes*, might be a program containing a wide range of elements.

Some academics and journalists alike recognize this concept of market diversity as beneficial to audiences. Meyer, noting the expanding media market is able to serve the public better now than at any other point in history, believes the market is sufficiently diverse to serve all public demand for news (Meyer, 1987). *Washington Post* columnist David Broder perceives in the wide selection of choices sufficient resources of quality, normative journalism:

This is a golden age because you've got the Internet, you've got NPR, you've got cable news channels. You've got C-SPAN. You've got three national newspapers that we never had through most of our history, two of which happen to be among the very best papers in the country and *USA Today* is week by week a better and more serious paper than it was the week before. It's a great time for people who want to be informed (Nieman Reports, 2000, p. 19).

The media industry, however, can only offer programming to the public. It is the audience that selects the type, content, and amount of information it is willing to consume. Even then, the effect on society of that transaction between media provider and

consumer is still not completely understood. “Social scientists currently do not provide good answers on how much news is enough to make democracy’s delegated decision making work well” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 5).

News Defined by Practice

Newsweek business writer Robert Samuelson echoed many of his journalistic colleagues when he wrote, “We journalists think we define news, and from day to day, we do” (Samuelson, 2004). In short, journalists define journalism by its practice. The American Society of Newspaper Editors, in 1923, prior to the existence of the electronic mass media, developed its Canons of Journalism in which it defined news by its mission: “The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time” (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1923). The canons identified seven elements – responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, sincerity-truthfulness-accuracy, impartiality, fair play, and decency – all of which reflected the social responsibility aspect of journalism.

The practical definitions of journalism remained traditional into the 1960s. Buckalew’s definition of journalism was developed in his observational study of 12 news editors in representative local television markets (Buckalew, 1969-70). Those practical measures of newsworthiness were principal, proximity, timeliness, visual quality, plus conflict and impact. Journalist Ted Koppel (2000) expanded on that practical definition-by-function by identifying the gatekeeping function of news. Former broadcast and cable network correspondent Bonnie Anderson argued, “the primary function of news is not

and should not be to entertain. It is to inform – with honesty, integrity and objectivity” (Anderson, 2004). Don Hewitt, the former executive producer of *60 Minutes*, stressed a strong watchdog component in his definition of journalism (2002). He cites a normative relationship in rejecting a more contemporary, pro-business definition of news. “News is not reporting good things companies do. If product works as promised, then company and consumer are even steven” (p. 143).

There are certain characteristics unique to television that affect viewer perception. Television is a personal medium that promotes a false sense of familiarity in which people identify with personalities, adding another aspect to the practical definition.

The news becomes not just what happened but what a familiar face and voice says happened, and the meaning of it is to some extent determined by how he says it ... Television news is not merely the same news delivered in a different way. Because its means of delivery changes its meaning to its audience – through its immediacy, through its connection to personalities, and through the inevitable superficiality created by the medium’s time constraints (Brinkley, 2003, p. 201-202).

In defining journalism by the way it is practiced, two forces have exerted increasing influence during the past generation – economic factors and advanced technology. Technological advances have changed the very practice of electronic journalism and, therefore, the nature of the definition of news. The most profound advance, live technology, allows journalists to easily present an event as it happens. Audiences value this tool (Papper, 2007). This tool, however, is often used at the expense of news of greater significance using any traditional, normative definition of journalism

(Tuggle, 2001). In short, Koppel notes, live images trump importance, replacing context with sensationalism. The journalist cited live reporting of the bombing of Baghdad in the original Gulf War, claiming the presentation was bereft of any contextual, journalistic content. “All too often, news is defined as whatever has happened in the last half hour ... On those kinds of stories, we not only provide depth – there is no end to the depths that we will provide” (Koppel, 2000). Hewitt, however, sees a varied electronic media universe that contains journalism of multiple definitions:

If there are two kinds of news regularly on television – news as it happens, or almost as it happens, on cable news channels and the news of the last twenty-four hours on the evening newscasts – *60 Minutes* seldom concerns itself with either. We are more interested in the news of the times in which we live (Hewitt, 2002, p. 9-10).

In addition to technological advances, a changing economic landscape has had a similarly profound effect on the corporate structure of the commercial journalism industry. These developments have also prompted changes in the actual definition of newsworthiness in which the commercial marketplace itself has become a factor in editorial decisions.

Market Driven Journalism

It has been well established that journalism, in addition to being a business afforded all of the rights and privileges of a corporate entity in a capitalistic system, is additionally tasked with an important social responsibility component. This is the essence of the trusteeship model of broadcasting. Relieving broadcast licensees of this social

responsibility, whether legally or philosophically, necessarily changes the model. John H. McManus, assistant professor of communications, researcher and former newspaper reporter, constructed in 1994 the first comprehensive model of news production that considered the concept of markets and the use of economics to explain what happens in television newsrooms. That model was presented in the award-winning (Sigma Delta Chi Medallion of Excellence for Research) study *Market Driven Journalism – Let the Citizen Beware?* McManus' market-driven model can be exemplified by the attitude of the chief operating officer of communications behemoth Clear Channel Communications – “Let the free markets reign” (Chen, 2003).

Within the concept of the market driven model, the citizen becomes the customer; news becomes a commodity. Market judgment, therefore, replaces journalistic judgment. The consumer becomes, in effect, the gatekeeper who decides what is and is not news. The traditional trusteeship model of broadcasting recognizes a compact between broadcaster and citizen. McManus, in his market driven model, theorizes more than one market. In addition to the audience, McManus identifies the stock market, the advertising market and the market for news sources as exerting influence in this new broadcast journalism paradigm (p. 5). There is a potential conflict between the goal of normative journalism – public enlightenment – and these three newly-identified markets (p. 88). One method for achieving normative journalism's goal is the exercise of the media's watchdog function. Such an exercise takes time and resources and is, therefore, costly. The results of such an exercise, if successful, has the potential of serving the public but harming the interests of a station's advertisers, investors, and the public and private

sources of news. Thus, in a market model, investigative reporting would result in overall harm to the news organization.

McManus developed a method to test this model by measuring journalistic quality in terms of newsgathering, with the variable being the effort of discovery – minimally active, moderately active and highly active. Greater activity reflects greater time and effort – which reflects expense. McManus’ study of a representative sample of news departments revealed market logic dominated journalistic logic most of the time. News departments driven by market logic most often opt for what the researcher terms “passive discovery” of news – news releases and media events. As McManus summarizes, “Market theory would dictate that editors select issues and events that have the greatest ratio of expected appeal for ideal demographic to news-gathering cost, and that stories should advance, or do minimal harm to, stock and advertising markets” (p. 114).

McManus contends this commodification of journalism is in direct conflict with the cultivation of public understanding. The researcher also implies market driven journalism injects a measure of dishonesty in the exchange between news provider and news consumer. “Local television journalists and editors present their work to both viewers and themselves as a public service that serves the market. But their actions demonstrate daily the fundamental contradiction between serving the marketplace of viewers and serving the public” (p. 181).

There are arguments in theory and in history to challenge McManus’ contentions. The sensationalism of the yellow journalism era, for example, disappeared as the *New York Times* model of journalism proved to be a more lucrative business model (Gardner *et al.*, 2001; Marks, 2006). Today’s soft news is often considered a descendant of the

yellow journalism of the Hearst-Pulitzer era (Patterson, 2003). Following that logic, if the normative values of traditional journalism continue to be rejected, the value of the franchise will decline (Underwood, 2001).

In the long run, entertainment programming is more entertaining than news for those who desire to be entertained. If they can temporarily be persuaded otherwise, they are unlikely to sustain their enthusiasm and will follow news irregularly. Meanwhile, those interested in hard news will also have a diminished appetite because the news is too soft or too nasty to meet their taste. Such readers, viewers, and listeners are irreplaceable (Patterson, 2003).

Papper, in his extensive study of news audiences, argues the biggest threat to traditional media is not a declining audience but an outdated business model (Papper, 2007). Meyer, in his study of parallel issues in the newspaper industry, suggests a change in the standard of measurement from circulation to Societal Influence Model. In such a model, Meyer argues good journalism leads to “influence ...” a quality with benefits that lead to an improved bottom line (Meyer, 2004).

News organizations might be about to change an operating model to improve their bottom lines, but that redefinition might be more cosmetic than substantive. News anchors have long been influential in attracting viewers to a particular news organization (Hamilton, 2004). CBS, in June 2008, eliminated several high profile and high-salaried veteran anchors at its owned and operated stations across the country.

“I would presume that everything has to be considered as the business moves forward, as television redefines itself and as the market redefines

itself,” said (WCCO’s Don) Shelby, a star anchor himself whose contract is up in 2010, to MinnPost.com ... “You’re talking about a financial struggle that is not cyclical,” says Jerry Gumbert, president and CEO of the broadcast consulting firm AR&D. “It’s not going to turn around soon, and probably not at all” (Potter, 2008).

As long as the current model exists, however, owners will continue to make decisions that affect news operations solely on the basis of profit margin. The bottom line will always be more powerful than the byline. Auletta is one who argues that it is the responsibility of journalists themselves to translate their concerns into the language corporate executives can understand to broaden the definition of success. He believes journalists must advance business reasoning to support journalistic claims, such as trading a lower short-term profit margin for a more valuable asset. “If journalists hope to bridge the cultural divide, they might start by understanding the value of earning a profit. More profits can mean hiring more reporters, or more time to report stories” (Auletta, 2003, p. xvi).

While the existing literature addresses the definition of news in theory and in practice, there are certain gaps regarding the attitudes of journalists themselves toward these changes. The gaps are specifically in the area of determining whether or not journalists on the lower end of the editorial scale – reporters and newswriters – actively consider the business component of the journalism industry when producing their reports, and whether or not journalists at this level have more antagonism toward the economic expectations of news operations as compared to news managers and news executives. This study attempts to address these gaps.

Sensemaking and Grounded Theory

Changing the format of a newscast is a risky proposition. The new style and appearance of the broadcast might cause existing viewers to abandon the program while at the same time not attracting enough new viewers to make the change worthwhile. Award-winning network news executive Av Westin noted the importance of viewer expectation. “We have essentially trained the viewer to expect that news programs will be more entertaining and titillating and sensational than substantive. Viewers won’t stay tuned to something that doesn’t match that expectation. The industry has hoisted itself on its own petard” (Hickey, 2001).

The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin was a radical departure from contemporary local newscasts in both content and appearance and, as such, might have set itself up for failure. This is explained theoretically by two of Weick’s seven properties for sensemaking – the ongoing process and extracted cues (Weick, 1995). Extracted cues, according to Weick, “are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50). An example of an extracted cue in a news broadcast might be a series of technical glitches. Viewers might interpret those glitches as overall incompetence on the part of the news organization regardless of journalistic substance. Audience perception, then, is a function of the cues viewers select in their decision-making processes. Similarly, viewer expectation is a function of an ongoing process. When it is interrupted, as Westin noted, viewer discomfort rises. A “feeling that viewers are missing something,” as previously noted by Kurtis, reflects an emotional, not logical, reaction. “Negative emotions are likely to occur when an

organized behavioral sequence is interrupted unexpectedly and the interruption is interpreted as harmful or detrimental” (Weick, 1995, p. 47).

The format change was also an interruption of the ongoing process for the WBBM-TV news organization. It is reasonable to expect the resulting emotional reaction was different for different groups and segments of employees. Not all employees were identified with the new broadcast – the change was at least in part specific to the 10 o’clock program – which might have been one source of any such tension. In such a close-knit environment, negative reaction could reasonably be expected to affect performance. Another element of the organizational culture of the newsroom, whether newswriters are conscious of it or not, is the legacy of the successful Jacobson-Kurtis era. Applying the Weickian concept to the organization would allow us to predict the earlier success of the WBBM news organization would be a standard to be equaled or even surpassed.

The difficulty in achieving that goal is explained by the theory itself. Absent reviewing hours of historic tape of those earlier broadcasts, the concept of the Jacobson-Kurtis broadcasts would be considered unreal as “any intellectually conceived object is always in the past and therefore unreal” (Weick , 1995, p. 24), “and anything that affects remembering will affect the sense that is made of those memories” (p. 26). Restated, the Jacobson-Kurtis era probably never existed on a day-to-day basis the way it is remembered. Exacerbating the concept of retrospection is that, for those employees who were not a part of the organization during that era, it existed for them only in lore. Theory would predict a feeling of self-imposed, unrealistic expectation.

When examining the role of sensemaking in organizations, we can draw parallels to the study of the Mann Gulch disaster, which detailed the demise of a highly select group of smokejumpers in a Montana wildfire on August 5, 1949. When the fast-moving inferno unexpectedly crossed the gulch, crew chief Wagner Dodge yelled for the crew members to drop their tools, lit a fire in the grass before them, and ordered them to lie down in the charred area. Instead, the men panicked and fled. Twelve of the 15 crewmembers and a lone forest ranger died. A subsequent investigation found they would have survived had they followed Dodge's instructions. Weick's study (1993) of the incident examined the collapse of sensemaking and structure in organizations. Weick identified several sources of resilience that make organizations less vulnerable to disruptions of sensemaking and structure, including improvisation, the attitude of wisdom, and norms of respectful interaction. Weick used the incident to illustrate organizations are susceptible to "sudden losses of meaning." The parallel to *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* is that the organization lost sight of its responsibility to produce a commercially viable broadcast in its insistence on adhering to a journalistic purity.

Weick's work might be a tool for understanding the relative success or failure of an organization. The purpose of this research, however, is to achieve greater and deeper understanding of the participants themselves. Applying existing theory, regardless of appropriateness, would necessarily limit such understanding. A grounded theory approach would be more appropriate to facilitate the possibility of new and deeper insight and understanding of any of the organization's participants. "The grounded theory style of analysis is based on the premise that theory at various levels of generality is

indispensable for deeper knowledge of social phenomena ... Such theory ought to be developed in intimate relationship with data, with researchers fully aware of themselves as instruments for developing that grounded theory” (Strauss, 1987, p. 6). The grounded researcher, therefore, allows the theory to emerge from collected data. “Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). A data analysis unconstricted by existing theory might result in new insight, new context, and might open a new line of future exploration. As Creswell (1998) notes, “grounded theory provided for the generation of a theory ... of actions, interactions, or processes through inter-relating categories of information based on data collected from individuals” (p. 63). Charmaz (2005; 2006) advocates a social constructivist perspective of grounded theory that includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views and actions. This context, compared to other philosophical variations, places more emphasis on views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals rather than on methods of research. This perspective is appropriate as the goal is to explore these emphasized characteristics of the participants.

Research Question

The greatest variables in the evolution of broadcast journalism have been newly-developed technologies and a drastically increased financial expectation of news organizations. These changes, as ongoing processes, consequently change the definition of broadcast news. In this study, which is centered on understanding the views and

attitudes of practitioners of broadcast news, the author examines whether journalists, themselves, should develop a definition of broadcast news that reflects the realities of their new paradigm.

Studies subsequent to McManus have provided sufficient evidence to reinforce the data indicating these economic realities have altered the editorial standards of news organizations. One recent study is by Kelley, who identified additional, profit-motivated newsworthiness criteria in local news organizations (Kelley, 2007). There is also a precedent for including economic considerations as part of the concept of social responsibility. Adams and Cleary (2007) identify a need for a new model that combines the high ideals and First Amendment considerations of social responsibility theory, while recognizing the economic realities of today's mega-corporate environment.

The Ten O'clock News: Reported by Carol Marin, by nature of its focus to create a normative news broadcast in the true Jeffersonian tradition, lends itself to the development of such a new model responsive to the new technological and economic paradigm. With such background the following research question will be considered –

- R1 – What would happen if a television news organization changed its format to reflect a traditional, normative, socially-responsible editorial policy in direct competition with modern, commercial news programming?

In exploring this question, the author will examine the elements of aesthetics and content as they affect news programming. He will explore editorial resilience in adversity and examine the attitude of a select group of local journalists toward corporate profit and the managers responsible for achieving fiscal goals. And the author will examine the attitude

of antagonism at different levels of the organization's editorial hierarchy toward upper level editorial managers and corporate executives.

Chapter III

History

DEMOCRATIC THEORY, ECONOMICS AND TECHNOLOGY

For the first time, there could be a way for a television show to feed the network's soul and, simultaneously, its pocketbook. We could look into Marilyn Monroe's closet as long as we looked into Robert Oppenheimer's laboratory, too. We could make the news entertaining without compromising our integrity.

Don Hewitt – CBS News

Local television news is the most popular source of news in America (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2004; Papper, 2007). The model for the genre, the trusteeship model, was established in the 1950s and 1960s by the networks. The major broadcast networks – CBS, NBC and, later on and to a lesser extent, ABC – developed the journalistic and economic model for the genre. The economic model of news divisions was influenced largely by two men – David Sarnoff of NBC and William S. Paley of CBS – and based largely on their belief that commercial, for-profit broadcasting should also accept a measure of social responsibility. These men, the chairmen of their respective networks, were essentially businessmen whose decisions formed the foundation of the broadcasting industry in the United States. They could have easily and understandably that all network programming be profitable, including news programming. Sarnoff and Paley, however, were excellent corporate stewards who also understood and respected the social responsibility of their medium. Both accepted this

responsibility personally during World War II. Sarnoff served on General Dwight Eisenhower's communications staff and was instrumental in the development of Radio Free Europe. He achieved the rank of brigadier general. Paley, as a colonel, also served on Eisenhower's staff in the psychological warfare branch of the Office of War Information.

There is ample evidence to demonstrate their dedication to public affairs programming was motivated not only by government requirement but also by their sense of responsible public service. Sarnoff's attitude is revealed in a collection of his writings:

Broadcasting stations, in my conception, are indeed the bar at which causes can be pleaded for the verdicts of public opinion ... So powerful an instrument for public good should be kept free from partisan manipulations. America today may be justly proud of the freedom of the press. In no country in the world has this freedom been preserved more steadfastly (Sarnoff, 1968).

One of Paley's motivations was his keen interest in news (Schaefer, 1998). Another was certainly his competitive spirit. It was his desire to beat NBC that motivated his demand for the program that is now considered, essentially, the first traditional radio newscast – the historic, *Anschluss* broadcast of March 13, 1938, chronicling Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria. The broadcast included live reports from London, Paris, Rome, Berlin and Vienna in addition to Washington and New York (Paley, 1979; Sperber, 1986). Both Paley and Sarnoff, with the luxury of having highly profitable entertainment divisions, allowed their costly network news divisions to operate at a

financial deficit while reaping a profit of good will (McCabe, 1987; Postman & Powers, 1992).

Largely on the work of Edward R. Murrow, the CBS news division enjoyed greater prestige and was seen as the leader in broadcast journalism. Paley understood that the intrinsic value of his news division went beyond the network balance sheet, setting an example for the industry. “As a result, the businessmen who ran the other networks allowed even their own news departments to compete on the same sensible ground” (Joyce, 1988). This allowed journalists to do their work in an environment insulated from the usual corporate realities of profit and loss. It was not considered unusual for journalists to be unaware of their program ratings (Hewitt, 2002). At CBS, news division president Richard Salant (1961-1964, 1966-1979) reflected Paley’s attitude by insisting that news and public affairs programs scrupulously avoid any techniques used in entertainment shows to protect the bright line between news and entertainment. Salant even urged reporters covering military operations in Vietnam to include long, on camera “stand-ups” to bring sufficient context to pictures of combat. “I recognize that strict application of this policy will result in higher costs or in a less technically perfect or interesting ‘show’ in certain instances. But our field is journalism, not show business” (Schaefer, 1998).

But Paley, as a business executive, was well aware of financial pressures. He foresaw a day, according to former CBS News president Fred Friendly, when he would be unable to protect the news division from the pressure of profit.

Paley used to say that if news ever becomes a profit center, we’re going to be in trouble. They’ve discovered that certain news makes a profit.

They've discovered that other news, the documentary, special reports, the *See it Now*s, the *NBC White Papers*, don't make a profit. They've discovered that at one network the morning news didn't make a profit, or not a big enough one. So everything is now being geared to what will make a profit (Broadcasting, 1986a).

The Public Interest, Convenience and Necessity

Social responsibility aside, Sarnoff, Paley and all other broadcast licensees faced a mandate to provide at least a modicum of social service programming. The Radio Act of 1927 required licensees to broadcast in the public interest, convenience and necessity. The regulation has been reaffirmed and extended to television broadcasters and, to a lesser extent, cable operators. The regulation, while open to various interpretations by prevailing political philosophies, is still a valid element of communication regulation. It is the essence of the trusteeship model of broadcasting around which the nascent broadcast networks built an industry and cultivated the trust of the American public. It allowed journalistic endeavors to be measured on a scale independent of a profit-loss measure (Schaefer, 1998). It allowed journalists such as Don Hewitt of CBS the freedom to work in the public interest without paying attention to ratings. "The difference between then and now is that they were obliged to give something back in exchange for their use of the public airwaves. That was what the Federal Communications Commission demanded. So if news was a loss leader, that was the price of doing business" (Hewitt, 2002).

In 1942, as radio journalism was in the midst of its most distinguished era, *Time* founding publisher Henry Luce perceived a competitive threat by what he believed to be “low journalism,” newspapers targeted to mass appeal. He also wanted to preempt any possible government intervention aimed at forestalling growing consolidation in the print industry. Luce asked Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, to chair a commission to assess the state of the industry. The resulting “Commission on Freedom of the Press” issued a report critical of consolidated media ownership and reinforcing the civic responsibility of the press.

The report, noting that mass media are big businesses owned by big businessmen, warned of corporate interest interfering in the marketplace of ideas. The commission, composed chiefly of academics, claimed that newspapers “have veered from their traditional position as leaders of public opinion to mere peddlers and purveyors of news ... the newspapers have become commercial enterprises and hence fall into the current which is merging commercial enterprises along mercantile lines” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 60). The report also predicted dire consequences if the nation’s newspapers were subject to unrestrained market forces in such a way that “a small group of media moguls could shape the coverage of key public affairs such as whom to vote for in a national election or whether to enter a distant war” (Gardner et al., 2001, p. 158).

While the report has tended to influence academic thinking toward journalism, the press industry itself was left indignant by the criticism (Bates, 1995). In retrospect, it could be interpreted as a window into the future of the broadcast industry. The future warned about by the Hutchins Commission is the contemporary era of corporate,

deregulated media. Three specific developments appear to be the major contributors of economic forces dictating editorial decisions and threatening the trusteeship model of the broadcast industry – the business trend toward corporate mergers, a government philosophy of deregulation to allow those mergers, and emergence of most popular broadcast journalism franchise in history.

The Point of No Return - *60 Minutes*

It is entirely possible that Don Hewitt has “more historic credits than anyone else in television news” (Bliss, 1991). Hewitt has worked with CBS News correspondents from broadcast pioneer Edward R. Murrow to current correspondent Scott Pelley. He was the first director of the first weekly television documentary series, the groundbreaking *See It Now*. Hewitt was the producer of the first televised presidential debates in 1960, the event that forever linked politics to television. He was the executive producer of the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* until he was fired from the program in 1967. That firing and Hewitt’s reassignment into the network’s documentary unit – considered at the time to be the news division’s purgatory – led directly to a revolution in the economic expectations of the broadcast journalism industry.

See It Now was created and produced by Murrow and Friendly. It earned four Emmy awards and one Peabody award during its seven year run from November 1951 to July 1958. It is considered one of the most substantive and prestigious examples of broadcast journalism in history. Murrow and Friendly produced historic *See It Now* episodes that included “Christmas in Korea,” “The Case of Lt. Milo Radulovich,” and “A Report on Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy.” *See It Now*, an historic landmark of public service

journalism, was not popular journalism. It seldom achieved audience ratings as impressive as its journalistic achievement.

Murrow also hosted a much more popular information program, *Person to Person*, a weekly celebrity interview program, from 1953 to 1959. (CBS News correspondent Charles Collingwood hosted the program for two additional years.) The format of the program called for Murrow, sitting in a New York studio, to interview celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Kate Smith and even John and Jacqueline Kennedy in their homes. Murrow, proud of the type of substantive journalism the *See It Now* crew produced, looked upon *Person to Person* with disdain and some embarrassment. The ratings success of *Person to Person*, however, made possible Murrow's work on *See It Now* (Sperber, 1986).

Paley cancelled *See It Now* after a showdown in his office with Murrow about what Murrow believed was network interference in the program (Paley, 1979; Sperber, 1986). The argument reflects Murrow's belief that news divisions should be immune from corporate influence. Paley offered Murrow, in its place, a monthly documentary series *CBS Reports*. One of his most memorable and outstanding documentaries for *CBS Reports* was his last, the landmark "Harvest of Shame." The series aired somewhat sporadically; the personnel in the documentary unit were eventually reassigned to other projects and programs. Thus, when CBS News president Friendly reassigned Hewitt to a new documentary unit, it was more of an exile than an assignment.

Hewitt, despite the significant demotion, seized the development as an opportunity. He put considerable thought into developing a formula that would be attractive to the network and the audience, and would still meet a public service need for

significant journalism. Hewitt looked to Murrow's record for inspiration. *See It Now* had been categorized as "High Murrow," while *Person to Person* had been informally dubbed "Low Murrow." The journalist, according to his autobiography, found his answer in both programs:

Why not put them together in one broadcast and reap the benefits of being *both* prestigious and the popular? For the first time, there could be a way for a television show to feed the network's soul and, simultaneously, its pocketbook. We could look into Marilyn Monroe's closet as long as we looked into Robert Oppenheimer's laboratory, too. We could make the news entertaining without compromising our integrity (Hewitt, 2002).

Hewitt's model for the program was the popular general-interest magazine *Life*, which he believed made a connection with its audience because it seemed to include something for everyone (p. 10). He outlined his proposal in a memorandum to CBS executives. In that correspondence, Hewitt argued that there should be time in the network's prime time schedule each week for 60 minutes of news programming. Unable to find a title for the new franchise, Hewitt lifted the idea from that memo. The resulting program, *60 Minutes*, became the most lucrative news program in the history of broadcast journalism (Bliss, 1991, p. 284). It was the most-watched television program during the 1979-1980 and 1982-1983 television seasons. It proved, according to Hewitt (p. 4), a television show could make money and "do good" at the same time. It also has earned billions of dollars in profits for CBS.

By becoming such a profitable franchise, *60 Minutes* changed the economic paradigm of broadcast journalism. William Paley's prediction that "if news ever becomes

a profit center, we're going to be in trouble," was about to become reality. The success of *60 Minutes* occurred at a time when the corporate and political philosophies of business and society were about to change dramatically. Thus, as corporate owners of broadcast properties saw that news could become profitable, they translated that into an ethos that broadcast news should be profitable. As noted by former CBS News president Ed Joyce (1988), "It'll never again be what it was under Paley ... Now, television's just another business. Instead of the world's biggest candy store, CBS is one more American corporation."

News Competition

Competition is the engine that powers a host of human endeavors. The essence of journalistic competition is to get the story first and to report the story best. The competitive spirit has been the motivating factor in a host of major accomplishments and advances in broadcast news. It was a sense of competition that led to the *Anschluss* broadcast – despite the fact that CBS engineers told Paley such an endeavor was technically impossible. Paley, Paul White, who was the director of public affairs and special events, and then-European director Edward R. Murrow were so insistent about beating NBC with the round-up, Murrow chartered an airliner to fly him to Austria, as the sole passenger, so he could report for the broadcast (Bliss, 1991; Kendrick, 1969; Paley, 1979; Persico, 1988; Sperber, 1986).

A sense of competitive accomplishment can overlay even the most historic of events. NBC News anchor David Brinkley, for example, could remember decades later the exact moment, to the second, his network first reported that President Kennedy had

been shot (2003, p. 187). He also remembered it took another minute and forty-two seconds for all local affiliates to switch to the network. Brinkley also mentioned in his autobiography with pride that NBC was the only network to air live the murder of suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Brinkley may stress this particular “accomplishment” as a counterbalance to the fact that CBS beat all other news outlets, including NBC, in reporting the death of the president by 17 minutes (Bliss, 1991, p. 337), a story ingrained in broadcast lore.

The career of *60 Minutes* creator Don Hewitt is peppered with examples of legendary competition. Hewitt, whose idol as a child was fictional star newspaper reporter Hildy Johnson (Bliss, 1991, p. 286), measured “success by the kudos they [reporters] got from the public and the recognition from colleagues and competitors for doing as well as they did” (Hewitt, 2002, p. 224). Hewitt, in his autobiography, recounted several instances that reflected his compulsion to beat the competition. Those instances included putting a CBS headset on vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon during a live impromptu news conference at the Republican National Convention in 1952 (p. 57), stealing NBC’s top-secret briefing book outlining that network’s coverage plans for the 1964 Republican National Convention, and hijacking an NBC remote truck during a 1959 visit to Iowa by Soviet party chairman Nikita Khrushchev (p. 65). All of these instances are reflective of the competitive spirit celebrated in the broadcast journalism industry. Such competition has no intrinsic economic motivation; yet, it is noteworthy because it is a factor in a broadcast operation’s public image and its fiscal bottom line. As noted by veteran journalist Ted Koppel:

Competition still gave the process its momentum; the need to boost circulation or attract an audience provided a constant reminder that we were operating in a market place of ideas. It was always a money-making operation, but there was an editorial process (Koppel, 2000).

Such a sense of competition was a motivating factor behind a stylistic revolution in broadcast journalism. It began at the local level in the mid-1960s and would rewrite the template of how television news was presented. Its title was “Eyewitness News.”

The Eyewitness News Revolution

Local broadcast journalists often equate viewership with success. They tend to use ratings supremacy as validation for a job well done. It was this attitude that, in early 1964, prompted Cleveland news director Al Primo to formulate a concept that would revolutionize television news. The predominant formula for news programs in the 1950s and early 1960s was fairly standard for all television news operations. An announcer sat at a desk and announced the events of the day, usually events from a governmental agency or some other official source. Film clips were limited mostly to comments from governmental officials. Primo, during the last weekend of November 1963, had paid keen attention to the non-stop television coverage of the Kennedy assassination. He concluded that one of the elements that captivated the audience was the reporting from the scene of actual events. It made viewers feel, he believed, as though they were personally witnessing and even participating vicariously in the historic events.

As a result, Primo wanted to see if a similar formula would have the same effect on the viewers of his station’s news program. He began filling KYW’s newscast with

film from news events, calling it “Eyewitness News.” Research showed a positive reaction from the audience. Simultaneous research by the consulting company McHugh & Hoffman for rival WJW confirmed Primo’s theories about audience reaction to incorporating news film into news broadcasts. In June 1965, station owner Westinghouse moved the operation back to its original Philadelphia home (Allen, 2001). Primo, subsequent to the move, researched the company’s union contract and learned there was nothing to prohibit reporters from appearing on the air themselves with no additional compensation above their regular salary. The concept of reporters delivering filmed reports from the scene of news events was radical and, as in the case of increased utilization of newsfilm in Cleveland, it clicked with viewers in Philadelphia (Wilkinson, 1997).

Primo’s changes were based on personality. Although KYW’s newscast was ranked No. 1 in the Philadelphia market, the program produced by competitor WCAU, anchored by the warm and inviting John Facenda, the original voice of NFL Films, was closing the ratings gap. Realizing that no single news personality could likely overcome Facenda’s appeal, he threw several newcomers at the audience. Those personalities, the reporters, were the surrogate eyewitnesses for the viewers (TV News Philadelphia, 1998-2004).

In 1968, WABC-TV, the network’s owned and operated station in New York, hired Primo away from Philadelphia in an attempt to breathe life into its fifth-place news operation. Channel 7’s *Eyewitness News* premiered on November 28, 1968, with a sophisticated studio set and a stable of smart young reporters with no previous journalism experience. Instead of covering government officials, they tailored their stories from the

point of view of the viewer. They were creating, in a sense, the “people’s news.”

McHugh & Hoffman, contracted by ABC, relied on its research to put the finishing touches on the newscast. The consultants discovered that audiences connected with studio anchors who seemed human, not those who appeared to be oracles delivering the news from on high. This was first revealed by research into the coverage of the Kennedy assassination. Viewers preferred Walter Cronkite’s “common man” persona that reflected their own emotions to the comparatively cold detachment of NBC’s Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, who at the time had the top-ranked network news program.

In 1970, WABC re-hired Bill Beutel, its original news anchor, paired him with incumbent anchor Roger Grimsby, and convinced the two to buy into the common man theory. The theory included its concept of “happy talk” – unscripted banter between news personalities. Grimsby and Beutel became fixtures in the nation’s largest market for 16 years, “the two most influential newscasters local television ever would produce” (Allen, 2001). Primo went on to become, in 1972, ABC’s youngest vice president, overseeing the news departments of the network’s owned and operated stations, leading the station group to record setting ratings and profits (Townley, 2000).

Although Eyewitness News subsequently became identified with the trivialization of local news – it was sometimes referred to as *Eyewitless* News – its theory was not unlike the philosophy espoused by Edward R. Murrow, the bastion of journalistic integrity. Murrow believed news programs should identify with the common citizen. He believed broadcast news, in the best Jeffersonian tradition, was a vehicle that should be used to educate the viewer. Author Joseph E. Persico, in his biography (1988) of the journalist, recounts a conversation Murrow had with the head of British broadcasting, Sir

John Reith. Reith, noting Murrow's background in education, hinted that CBS broadcasts would now be more intellectual. "Murrow answered, 'On the contrary, Sir John, I want our programs to be anything but intellectual. I want them down-to-earth and comprehensible to the man in the street.' 'Then,' Reith said, 'you will drag radio down to the level of the Hyde Park Speaker's Corner.' 'Exactly,' Ed replied."

Whether or not Murrow would have endorsed the Eyewitness News concept of broadcast journalism – Murrow died in 1965 – the revolution begun by Primo forever transformed the genre. The broadcast networks eventually adopted the style. It was the first major instance in which the networks adopted a trend developed on the local level. The Eyewitness News concept also intensified the often-fierce competition between news organizations in local markets. In short, television news was forever transformed.

Demographics - Programming for Some

Managers use demographic information to segment populations by specific categories such as age, income, gender, geography, heritage and other defined characteristics. It is used as a marketing tool. They also use demographic information to identify specific audience groups they most want to reach. This allows those organizations to reach these target audiences more efficiently. Communication companies, for example, identify audiences most desirable to their advertisers and then develop programming to appeal to those specific groups. A targeted audience is more valuable to an advertiser than a mass audience. Communication companies can charge higher advertising rates for delivering targeted audiences. The new real standard of success is not the overall size of the audience itself, but the demographic breakdown of

the audience into age groups, with younger viewers most favored by the advertisers (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 6).

Introducing demographics into the process of journalism implies an attack on the trusteeship model by supplanting the democratic tradition and ideals of journalism with commercial considerations. That practice, in actuality, has allowed some cable channels to surpass mere economic viability to achieving market success. Fox News, for example, identified a political demographic, conservatives, and packaged news and information programs in a way that appealed to their particular perspective. Segmenting the market in such a way would not have been possible a generation ago.

Targeting audiences has become ingrained to the point that Koppel calls it the “dictatorship of the demographic” (Koppel, 2006). The segment doing the dictating is the one most prized by advertisers, the 18-34 age group. Advertisers target this group because of its level of disposable income, its position as societal agenda setters, and its expected longevity. News programmers have targeted this group by producing softer, non-traditional news programs. This would seem to be counterintuitive, however, to target the 18-34 group because it is the group least likely to watch television news (Hamilton, 2004).

Programming softer news for this limited and mostly indifferent segment has tended to degrade normative journalistic standards. “There are too many important things happening in the world today to allow the diet to be determined to such a degree by the popular tastes of a relatively narrow and disinterested demographic” (Koppel, 2006).

Any argument in the conflict about normative editorial content and social responsibility of news providers must always revisit the original Jeffersonian

purpose of journalism that is the basis for its First Amendment protection. The free and unrestricted debate in the marketplace of ideas provides a well-informed public to make responsible decisions of self-government. The lack of such debate makes vulnerable the foundation of liberty. Bernstein claims we are, instead, left with an “idiot culture” (Bernstein, 1992). Cronkite claims, “We are producing a population of political, economic, scientific ignoramuses.” Such critics believe proof is evident by the nature of contemporary news and information programming.

We’ll Always Have Paris... and Anna

During the week of February 4, 2007, cable television news outlets determined the death of model Anna Nicole Smith to be the most important story in the world as measured by the amount of time devoted to all news stories. It was the third most important news story of all combined major U.S. news media, behind only reports of United States policy in Iraq and stories about actual events of the war in Iraq. Smith’s death was afforded the fifth-greatest block of time by the traditional broadcast network news networks (Jurkowitz, 2007a). Three months later, the legal problems of socialite Paris Hilton was the third most reported story by cable news outlets. Only the U.S. presidential campaign and the debate about immigration reform received more attention. Four stories – the campaign, immigration reform, U.S.-Russian relations and the criminal case against former White House aide Lewis Libby – were the only ones to receive more attention by the combined major U.S. news media (Jurkowitz, 2007b). In the second-largest television market in the United States, on the day President Bush announced his

plans to deploy National Guard troops along its state border with Mexico, KCBS-TV's main evening newscast devoted 40 seconds to the story. The producers of that same newscast, in anticipation of "sandal season," allocated two minutes to a report about cosmetic toe surgery (Writers Guild of America-East, 2007). These are all examples supporting the contention that the media are obsessed with anything that will build ratings (Underwood, 2001). That increasingly includes so-called news about you, "news to use at your next doctor" visit, PTA meeting, or family dinner-table discussion" (Tucher, 1997).

Traveling the high road was what made you proud to be a broadcast journalist, back in the day when broadcast journalism could hold its own with the best of print. Today, a lot of what passes for new on television couldn't hold its own with a supermarket checkout counter (Hewitt, 2002, p. 224).

Economics

An objective press free from control by political or governmental agencies is critical to the workings of a democratic society (Fiske, 1987). The absence of political and governmental participation, however, would necessarily require private ownership. Private enterprise introduces a commercial aspect into the information equation. This commercial consideration is, of course, the foundation of the dialectic between profit and social responsibility. A reasonable and expected goal of any commercial enterprise is profitability. As Auletta notes, however, "if journalism was not about more than profits, we would not receive special protections under the First Amendment" (2003).

This balance between commercial concern and responsible citizenship is a central issue in this contemporary dynamic. It is the simple difference between a commodity and an idea. In commercial journalism, they are one and the same. Media providers must offer a marketable product attractive to consumers to be commercially viable. Yet, the quality of our national discourse necessarily depends on the information available (Tuchman, 1978). Postman and Powers (1992) are among the scholars who insist profit motive should be secondary to responsible citizenship:

To understand what is happening in the world and what it means requires knowledge of historical, political, and social contexts. It is the task of journalists to provide people with such knowledge. News is not entertainment. It is a necessity in a democratic society. Therefore, TV news must give people what they *need*, along with what they *want* (Postman & Powers, 1992).

Mandating responsibility

The popular commercial news industry in America can be traced to the 1830s and the advent of the penny press. Newspapers prior to this period were in large measure supported by political parties and were editorially partisan. These publications existed specifically to promote certain political issues and values. Content was largely designed to appeal to the educated and commercial classes. Publishers began to realize they could increase profits by replacing partisan sponsors with commercial advertising. These advertisers offered goods and services to the general public, prompting publishers to seek a wider audience. The resulting circulation wars between Hearst and Pulitzer presaged

the contemporary media landscape, as was the advent of populist yellow journalism. Editorial abuses led to a voluntary code of ethics (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1923) that, in the absence of government regulation, proved to be largely ineffective in the face of market forces.

Conversely, early radio broadcasters saw themselves more as entrepreneurs than as “the press.” Unregulated competition on the airwaves caused a drop in the sales of radio sets as listeners, increasingly unable to receive clear signals, tuned out. Broadcasters, in an attempt to bring order to the anarchy on the airwaves, turned to the government. The solution was written into the Radio Act of 1927, which created the Federal Radio Commission. The act recognized the airwaves as a limited public resource. Broadcasters would be allowed exclusive license to use, not own, specific frequencies. In return for the use of this limited resource, licensees would be required to fulfill a public service component – to operate in the public convenience, interest, and necessity. The government philosophy of the basic purpose of broadcasting was a Jeffersonian view later described by the FRC’s successor as “the development of an informed public opinion through the public dissemination of news and ideas concerning vital public issues of the day ... The foundation stone of the American system of broadcasting ... is the right of the public to be informed” (FCC, 1949). Broadcasters traded anarchy for government protection, and the price was a duty to social responsibility.

The Search for Truth

The Communications Act of 1934 protected the interests of commercial broadcasters from claims by educators and non-commercial broadcasters for more

frequencies. The price of this protection was greater attention to educational and public affairs programming. Commercial radio developed news programming during the 1930s and 1940s to meet its public service obligation. It was an era of global consequence in which the public, for the first time, received news of momentous events, instantly, from around the globe. The significance of important world events deepened the responsibility of broadcasters. Both government and academe reinforced this responsibility through the findings of the so-called Hutchins Commission – the Commission on Freedom of the Press. The report stated, “It is no longer enough to report *the fact* truthfully. It is now necessary to report *the truth about the fact*” (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 22). Further studies reaffirmed the impact of contextual reporting on citizen judgment (Iyengar, 1991).

The subsequent landmark work, *Four Theories of the Press*, appeared to ratify the Hutchins Commission while reaffirming the governmental watchdog role of the press. Siebert *et al.* cited libertarian theory in advocating that the media “help discover truth, to assist in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions. The essential characteristic of this process [is] its freedom from government controls or domination” (1963, p. 51). The researchers continued, “The characteristic of the libertarian concept of the function of the press which distinguishes it from the other theories . . . is the right and duty of the press to serve as an extralegal check on government” (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 56).

Acknowledging this heightened responsibility, professional organizations such as the Radio-Television News Directors Association and the Society of Professional Journalists developed their own codes of ethics. Although such codes actually served to

reinforce public interest regulations required by license, adherence was often based more on ethical decision than legal compulsion (Napoli, 2001).

The Philosophy Shifts

Broadcast news, specifically television, was a secondary news source in America until the early 1960s. It is generally believed that the around-the-clock coverage of the Kennedy assassination by the major broadcast networks was the watershed event that revealed the compelling power of the medium (Brinkley, 2003). This paradigm shift could be considered incompatible with traditional normative journalism – the power of television is in its images, while one of the central purposes of journalism is often considered to be the communication of ideas (Koppel, 2000). Television, since becoming the primary source of news for Americans, has also proved to be the most impactful source of information. Studies by Iyengar have consistently shown that television news “shapes the American public’s conception of political life in pervasive ways ... television news is news that matters” (Iyengar, 1987, p. 2). In short, Iyengar and Kinder report, “TV news has become Americans’ single most important source of information about political affairs” (p. 112).

The three major broadcast networks, for more than 50 years, dominated news coverage with a commitment to excellence (Postman & Powers, 1992). In the mid-1980s, however, the philosophy began a shift from informing the public to serving the public marketplace (Underwood, 2001). In short, broadcasters began treating audiences less as citizens and more as consumers. The federal government shift toward deregulation in the private sector extended to broadcasting. The philosophy, as it pertained to the media and

as expressed by FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, is that broadcasters are better able to serve the public than government regulators. “If we let the industries operate with fidelity to the markets they want to serve, the public is better off. And even if improvements aren’t all that great, the old system of heavy-handed FCC regulation hadn’t led to a sense of public satisfaction. If complex regulations still had begot the vast wasteland, maybe a new approach was needed to make the desert bloom” (Ferrall, 1989).

The Effects of Deregulation

More than a quarter of a century after this national shift toward deregulation, it is generally agreed that the U.S. political process has been radically transformed in large part by the power and influence of television. Television has become the primary arena of political discourse in the United States. Candidates for elective office generally include two major elements in their overall campaign strategies. One is to communicate directly to voters through expensive media campaigns; the other is to attract free coverage by television news media. These two elements have changed the overall political discourse to match the visual appeal and short attention span innate to the users of the medium. The high cost of these media-centered campaigns has been the engine driving the increasingly higher price tag of political campaigns. This has also resulted in the increased political influence of rich and powerful donors. As summarized by former vice president and 2000 presidential candidate Al Gore (2007), “The Republic of Letters has been invaded and occupied by the empire of television.”

This new political paradigm has changed not just the process of achieving elective office but media skills necessary to be considered viable, as media interpretation often

determines success (Shaw, 1999). Quoting PBS journalist Jim Lehrer, M.S. Mason (2000) writes that a candidate must stand before a studio audience and connect with its members, and then beyond them to the millions of viewers who have tuned in. “It’s part of the job description. If you are going to be president of the United States and guide and lead the American people, you had better be able to communicate with them on television,” he says. “It goes with the office.”

The incessant campaign quest for free media in the form of television coverage causes candidates to schedule highly visible campaign “events.” The main purpose of these “pseudo-events” is not to directly attract or convert a crowd of supporters but to reach into the homes of potential voters through the lens of news cameras. Postman and Powers (1992) claim this so-called pseudonews “fixes people’s attention on what is peripheral to an understanding of their lives, and may even disable them from distinguishing what is relevant from what is not.” If the focus is on peripheral issues during campaigns, officials, once elected, might be free to pursue substantive issues that constituents may necessarily reject if properly informed (Hamilton, 2004).

The donors who finance candidates have filled the vacuum created by an inadequately informed electorate. Hewitt contends that the United States no longer has “free elections, but “expensive elections” in a political system that has been subverted by advertising dollars. Television makes it “impossible for anyone to be ‘freely’ elected, and that the principle qualification for holding office would be an ability to raise cash *and* who can do that without having a hand in some lobbyist’s pocket and his hand in yours?” (Hewitt, 2002). This new paradigm is increasingly seen as a threat to a strong democracy, as noted by former Vice President Al Gore:

What television's dominance has come to mean is that inherent value of political propositions put forward by candidates is now largely irrelevant compared with the image-based ad campaigns they use to shape the perceptions of voters ... And as a result, ideas will continue to play a diminished role... our democracy is in danger of being hollowed out (Gore, 2007).

A New Corporate Reality

All three major broadcast networks have undergone multiple ownership changes and mergers since the mid-1980s. These changes mirrored a national trend of corporate mergers and consolidation. Billionaires Laurence and Robert Tisch, owners of the Lowes Corporation, took over CBS in 1986 by purchasing a 24.9 percent share of the company. Laurence Tisch became CEO. Westinghouse Electric bought CBS in 1995 for nearly \$5.5 billion. The new owner consolidated CBS with entertainment conglomerate Viacom. NBC was a wholly-owned subsidiary of RCA. It generated, in the mid-1980s, more than 40 percent of the company's earnings, making it vulnerable to a corporate takeover. General Electric, an original owner of 30 percent of the network, purchased RCA in 1985 for \$6.3 billion. Former GE executive Robert Wright was installed as chairman.

ABC was formed in 1943 when the FCC forced NBC to sell one of its two broadcast networks. Edward J. Noble bought the NBC Blue network and, eight years later, sold it to Leonard Goldenson and United Paramount Theaters for \$25 million. ABC, historically considered the weakest of the three major broadcast networks, became the first of the three to change ownership in the mid-1980s when Capital Cities

Communication engineered a \$3.5 billion takeover. Less than a decade later, The Walt Disney Company bought Capital Cities/ABC for \$19 billion. It was the biggest media merger in history.

These transactions effectively ended the paternalistic-style of management at all three networks. CBS founder Paley saw the network as fulfilling a public trust; successor Tisch saw CBS as a source of profit. In an interview shortly after the purchase, Tisch said, “Well, my original investment was purely for investment purposes ... We’re large investors in the company and we hope that the investment for the long run works out profitably” (Broadcasting, 1986b). Tisch’s original investment was \$800 million. His share of the sale to Westinghouse Electric was approximately \$2 billion.

The networks were now operated as any non-media company. Public service, if it was a concern at all at the highest corporate level, appeared to be a secondary concern to profit. CBS board member and former news anchor Walter Cronkite (1996) charged his colleagues on the new CBS board as being “concerned only with company’s finances, not programming,” (p. 372) and characterized Tisch as cutting fat, muscle, and all the way to the bone (p. 371). The consolidations and mergers led to substantial reductions in each network news division, including the closure of foreign and domestic news bureaus (Auletta, 1991). “At ABC News, President Roone Arledge calls it ‘reinventing the news.’ At CBS News, President Howard Stringer speaks of ‘streamlining the process.’ At NBC News, the phrase is ‘reevaluating the mission.’ ... The result was predictable: a news report of lower aspirations” (Diamond, 1991). The commitment to dollars replaced the commitment to excellence (Postman & Powers, 1992). Schaefer (1998) noted that, at CBS, the historic leader of public service journalism, the public criticism was heaviest.

In the 1980s, resources that once went into public service began to be funneled into more financially rewarding aspects of the television business. The era of Paley, Stanton, and Salant had come to a close, and with it much of their grand vision for CBS News. The public service arm of the network was incorporated back into the relentless profit-oriented mission of the parent company (Schaefer, 1998).

The trend, since the paradigm shift began in the mid-1980s, has continued. It has been exacerbated by the advent of 24-hour cable news and instant Internet access to news, both of which have cut into advertising revenue once earmarked for the networks. In June 2008, CBS fired several highly-paid veteran journalists at its owned and operated local stations. The network acknowledged the driving force was economics. The development, according to media analyst Deborah Potter, might signal a new trend for the broadcast journalism industry:

And that means the local TV news formula of using star anchors to attract viewers may be headed for the ash heap. It's expensive and apparently not that efficient if you consider the recent downturn in both audience and advertising (Potter 2008).

There is a precedent for operating a television news organization without high profile and highly-paid anchors. It is the formula Ted Turner used to establish his groundbreaking Cable News Network in the 1980s. Whether the development is isolated to the CBS owned and operated stations or it becomes a more widespread trend, corporate heads of broadcast news organizations will continue to find ways to increase profits. The shakeout is far from over.

The U.S. Ratifies the Market-Driven Model

The trusteeship model of broadcasting mandated licensees to operate in the “public interest, convenience and necessity.” The 104th Congress, in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, effectively replaced the trusteeship model with a market-driven model. The act increased the reach of television group owners from 25 percent to 35 percent of the total U.S. audience and relaxed intramarket ownership restrictions. The act also nearly tripled the term of broadcast licenses, from three years to eight, and made it more difficult for incumbent licensees to be challenged. No longer would regulators assess whether a prospective licensee might better serve the public interest. Renewal of incumbent broadcaster licenses was required absent any serious violations of the Communications Act or FCC rules, and absent any pattern of abusing the law or commission regulations. The rationale behind these changes was twofold. The first rationale cited increased competition from the developing cable industry as being a sufficient safeguard for public discourse. The second followed the prevailing political philosophy of market self-regulation. Although this new market-driven model did not eliminate the “public interest, convenience and necessity” standard, the act gave the FCC no guidance for its interpretation under the new, relaxed ownership provisions. These changes made the renewal of a broadcast license nearly rubber-stamp automatic, giving licensees a virtual green light to serve the profit motive at the expense of their responsibility to properly inform the public.

Once President Bill Clinton signed the new regulations into law on February 8, 1996, large and well-financed corporate concerns began building broadcast properties. San Antonio-based Clear Channel Communications, for example, owned 43 radio

stations and 16 television stations when the act was signed into law. By 2008, the corporation had grown to more than 1,200 radio stations and more than 40 television stations. (Clear Channel sold all of its television stations in March 2008 for \$1.2 billion. Three months later, new owner Newport Television reduced the workforce of those stations, nearly 2,200 employees, by 7.5 percent.) The motivation of Clear Channel's founder and CEO Lowry Mays was not public service; the motivation was purely financial.

“If anyone said we were in the radio business, it wouldn't be someone from our company,” says Mays, 67. “We're not in the business of providing news and information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products” (Chen, 2003).

A Dichotomy of Purpose

The Eyewitness News concept became an entrenched style in local markets across the United States by the late 1970s. Changes subsequently became more and more extreme. In the face of increased corporate pressure for ratings and profits, news programs became increasingly “soft” with fewer stories about significant events of the day and more time devoted to light features, consumer tips, celebrity news, and inconsequential chatter between the anchors. Traditional journalists and academics alike began questioning anew the balance between corporate demand for profit and the responsibility to provide substantive information relative to good citizenship. It is a

debate that continues unabated in today's converged media paradigm. Napoli, for example, argues:

The idea that mass media organizations have a public service obligation and an obligation to enhance the democratic process extends to both the regulated and unregulated components of the media industry. The journalism profession's status as the 'Fourth Estate' provides a powerful indication of the extent to which the mass media industries are assumed to operate in a manner that accounts for the political interests of the public, in addition to the economic interests of owners and stockholders (Napoli, 2001).

Walter Cronkite, in retirement, expands the burden of journalistic responsibility to the corporate community at large. He argues, "social responsibility should be shared by big business to support government programs to improve education and support media outlets that strive to produce quality journalism" (Cronkite, 1996, p. 381).

Traditional journalists often tend to demonize corporate ownership for its emphasis on profit rather than social responsibility. One of the more vocal such journalists is CBS *60 Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney. Rooney began working at the network in the early 1950s as a writer and producer. In a column syndicated in some 300 U.S. newspapers, Rooney pointedly indicted CBS corporate managers:

CBS, which used to stand for the Columbia Broadcasting System, no longer stands for anything. They're just corporate initials now. If it was money the company wanted to save, firing a couple of \$150,000-a-year V.P.'s would have saved more than firing a lot of \$50,000-a-year people

... The people running network news operations would like to see their news standards maintained, but they are company men first and newsmen second. Unlike some of their predecessors, they are not willing to die professionally for journalistic principles. For them, news is a business enterprise first and a moral enterprise second (McCabe, 1987).

Rooney's bile might be reflective of the attitudes of many traditional journalists. It is not, however, a universally held position in the journalistic profession. Hewitt, Rooney's former *60 Minutes* boss, actually describes the program itself as a business, a successful business at that. Hewitt addressed Rooney's comments directly when writing that he cannot understand the demonizing of the communication business.

It makes no sense for people like us to get all high and mighty about the corrupting influence of money in the news business when we ourselves are the beneficiaries of this newfound prosperity (Hewitt, 2002, p. 225).

It might not be coincidence that Hewitt, as a news editor and executive, is higher up on the editorial scale than is Rooney. The commentator is responsible only for his own contributions to the news magazine. Hewitt was responsible to the company for the entire franchise. It might be significant if such attitudes between journalists at comparable levels of editorial hierarchies in other news organizations are similar to the Hewitt-Rooney dialectic.

A New Frontier

Media expansion in the commercial marketplace has spawned a new, publicly-driven media debate that had moved increasingly further away from traditional

journalism. Pop culture is now an integral element in the national political discourse. MTV has even commissioned voter preference polls (Ebenkamp, 1996). Candidates, by the 2008 presidential campaign, actively sought opportunities to appear – campaign – on so-called low-brow pop culture television shows such as *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Access Hollywood*, *Extra*, and even *World Wrestling Entertainment*. “In a campaign where ‘elitist’ has become a choice slur, the candidates are especially eager to win down-home credibility with this year’s ‘It’ demographic: ‘low information voters...’ They base their votes in part on the issues, but just as much – if not more – on how well they *like* the candidate” (Smalley & Kliff, 2008).

The melding of journalism with pop culture has been ratified in an arena separate from the media and academe. The Appellate Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey, in a privacy lawsuit, defined as news the reality TV series *Trauma: Life in the ER*. It is believed to be the first instance in which a pseudo-entertainment program has been granted First Amendment protection by the courts for its journalistic content.

The newly blurred line between entertainment and news has been the industry’s way of answering the increased competition for advertising dollars. According to Patterson, the number of news stories from the early 1980s to 2000 that had a moderate to high level of sensationalism increased from 25 percent to 40 percent, and news stories with a human interest element more than doubled from 11 percent to 26 percent (Patterson, 2000). The traditional broadcast network news operations are not exempt from this trend. NBC, for example, has tried to differentiate its *NBC Nightly News* from its competitors by making the newscast more relevant to viewers’ daily lives by offering more of a magazine-style broadcast with less traditional, serious news from Washington

and more user-friendly topics like health, the family, and consumer issues with feature reports. McClellan (1997) noted the objections of advocates of traditional journalism:

Detractors have accused NBC of “dumbing down” its evening news product for the sake of ratings. [Nightly News executive producer David] Doss counters that the network has simply tried to make the newscast more relevant to more viewers’ daily lives. “Where does it say that hard news has to be boring to be serious?” he asks (McClellan, 1997, p. 50).

Bill Moyers claimed he witnessed the same thing at CBS. “We began to be influenced by the desire first to please the audience. The object was to ‘hook’ them by pretending that this was not news at all” (Alter, 1986). A Farnsworth and Lichter study analyzed nearly six thousand network news campaign stories and concluded news coverage has worsened over time, affecting the balance between issues reporting and “soft” news (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2003). The pacing of traditional newscasts quickened and investigative reporting was increasingly being phased out as “unsexy and too expensive” (B. D. Johnson, 2004). “Television news, in response to economic pressures, competition, and perhaps a basic lack of commitment to the integrity and value of the enterprise, has become so trivial and devoid of content as to be little different from entertainment programming” (Brinkley, 2003, p. 203). McManus used the “empty church” analogy to reinforce the point. If a preacher so dilutes and distorts the message to fill the pews, the exercise ceases to be worship and mission becomes more secular than sacred. “If television news replaces what’s important with what is interesting to fill its electronic pews, it ceases to be news” (McManus, 1994, p. 169).

Economic Reality

To be viable in the commercial marketplace, broadcasters must produce programming that attracts an audience large enough to generate sufficient profits. NBC News journalist David Brinkley, a principal in one of the earliest television journalism efforts – the 1956 national political conventions – sensed engaging the audience was essential. Brinkley understood that people would not hear what he had to say if they were bored. “We realized that audiences would not sit still for the serious stuff unless we gave them something entertaining as well... I might have been naïve, but I thought that serious news could be presented in an entertaining way, and that’s what I tried to do at the conventions” (Brinkley, 2003). Fellow network journalist Ted Koppel agreed that broadcast news cannot be an “eat-your-vegetables” proposition. “Now, television news should not become a sort of intellectual broccoli to be jammed down viewers’ unwilling throats. We are obliged to make our offerings as palatable as possible” (Koppel, 2006).

Television, as a visual medium, also brought images into the perception and decision-making processes of viewers. Those people who watched the 1960 presidential debates on television, for example, believed Kennedy “won;” those who listened to the debate on radio favored Nixon. It was an example of media effects – the impact of images might be more significant than the impact of substance. Television, as Hernandez noted, brought a new element to the debates. “How you looked was as important, if not more so, than what you said” (Hernandez, 1994). ABC news correspondent Judy Muller, as quoted by Gourley (2001), thinks entertainment has a place in news programming.

Obviously, no one will pay attention to a story if it is not interesting, compelling, and well-told... (But) in a market hungry for more and more

stories to fill up the endless hours of news-magazines, integrity-challenged producers may find it more and more tempting to “create” facts when it suits their purpose (Gourley, 2001).

“Creating facts” violates any ethical standard of journalism. The usual editorial conflict is most often between traditional journalism and devices designed to elicit audience engagement. Broadcast journalists of an earlier era were usually insulated from the commercial pressures of the industry (Schaefer, 1998). The most common editorial consideration journalists faced was often between the usually clear distinction of what the audience needed to know and what they believed the audience wanted to know.

“Depending upon the nature of the newspaper or broadcast, the balance between what ‘affects’ and what ‘interests’ is quite different” (Cronkite, 1996, p. 362-363). Instead, Postman and Powers argued:

Some news professionals believe that news departments dedicated to good solid journalism will bring credibility to the whole broadcast network or local station and that therefore profitability should be secondary to educating the public for the common good. But news professionals usually aren’t as powerful as accountants (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 6).

In the expanding and increasingly competitive universe of electronic journalism, the power of accountants gained on and overcame the normative influence of news professionals. The culture of corporate executives is purely business. It is how they keep score and measure success. This is not an ethic traditionally shared by journalists. There is sentiment, however, that it should (Auletta, 2003, p. xii).

Commercial Pressure

The first generations of broadcast journalists were largely divorced from the pressure of the economic necessities of the communication industry. The insulation from economic reality enjoyed by broadcast journalists disappeared as the public service requirement was subsumed by free market philosophy, and as corporate owners universalized economic expectation for all departments and divisions. Television journalists who once competed for viewers for professional satisfaction were forced into the position of competing for viewers to meet financial goals. In short, ratings pressure increased. Journalists were expected to deliver ratings for advertisers, not necessarily to produce responsible journalism.

News managers, as a reaction to this new fiscal pressure, began changing the content of their news programs. These managers, in an attempt to attract the largest possible audiences, began emphasizing stories they believed their audiences wanted to know as opposed to the content socially responsible gatekeepers believed they needed to know. The new prime directive was to attract the largest possible audience. “The content of the program is almost incidental. If the people want to watch it, then the network wants to show it. In this sense, television is a department store window, in which the product displayed most prominently is whatever sells best” (McCabe, 1987). “Advertisers have no functional concern with the meanings or consequences of mass communication except insofar as it provides a mechanism for the delivery of their message to prospective customers” (Bogart, 1989, p. 6). News executives who bought into the new concept – often as a survival mechanism to preserve their jobs – developed new, philosophical justifications for this soft news. Postman and Powers postulated, however, “the real

justification for soft news is to present a ‘television commercial show’ interrupted by news” (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 24).

The most recent corporate philosophy for maximizing profits is a concept termed “synergy.” Synergy can be defined as requiring different types of media properties to share resources and personnel, with journalists doing tasks across these platforms. For example, a television reporter covering an assignment might also be required to post a story, complete with text and photos, on the station’s web page and then produce an audio story for the company’s co-owned radio station all before beginning the process of producing a report for the television station’s evening newscast. The time necessary to accomplish all these extra tasks often precludes journalists from performing other essential tasks of normative reporting, such as cultivating well-placed sources. The consequences can be grave. McClatchy News Service reporter Jonathan Landay believes these constant job demands kept journalists from doing their due diligence in the days preceding the invasion of Iraq and consequently limited national debate of a critical issue. “You have to take the time to find those people ... when do you have the time to sit and cultivate sources to get them to talk to you about what essentially is top secret information?” (Moyers, 2008).

Synergy, in another iteration, might also be defined as eliminating barriers between a broadcast company’s divisions to foster cooperation between, for example, the sales and news departments. Such corporate teamwork would necessarily compromise journalistic independence and, therefore, journalistic integrity (Auletta, 2003, p. xv). Such a compromise moves normative, socially responsible journalism another step away from its Jeffersonian ideal. This ideal is the justification for media’s First Amendment

protection. Hewitt speculates that, if they could have foreseen an electronic media so fundamentally different than the print media, the authors of the First Amendment might have treated the electronic media differently from the press (Hewitt, 2002).

Traditional normative journalism, however, is still being practiced despite these new financial requirements. Many journalists and scholars alike maintain the public is still being served well, although differently. “Mainstream commercial media organizations still provide much of the information – or, at least, the credible information – upon which society’s communication pyramid is erected” (Underwood, 2001, p. 112). The expanded, multi-channel media universe allows the opportunity for a wide variety of journalistic genres to exist in the competitive market. It is a universe that was made possible by satellite technology and made available to millions of homes through coaxial cable. Not all traditional journalists, however, agree.

Discontent in the Newsroom

News personnel in an earlier era were concerned almost exclusively with the quality of their work. Those broadcast journalists were largely insulated from the economic realities of the communication industry. Encroachment by general managers and sale department personnel was generally met with antagonism, as exemplified by the Murrow-Paley confrontation regarding *See It Now*. In the new bare bones, multi-channel, converged landscape of television journalism, news executives are increasingly held accountable for the profitability of their organizations. The journalists who are actually tasked with gathering, producing and presenting the news are most removed from financial responsibility. Yet, they are the people who must make the adjustments each

time corporate pressure leads to newsroom budget cuts and changes in editorial philosophy. They are often asked to produce more with no additional resources. They must sometimes make the resulting ethical compromises and, if public service was a motivating factor in career choice, might bear feelings of guilt for those unmet responsibilities. And their job security, voluntarily or otherwise, is increasingly an issue. As such, the new economic realities of the industry may, at times, exacerbate their antagonism toward management.

These new pressures may be directly affecting the integrity of their work. A 2007 Writers Guild of America-East study of newswriters revealed newsroom employees perceive a marked decline in the quality of their product. The survey identified several elements degrading quality, including the increased recycling of news, a de-emphasis on fact checking, and a shift from traditional hard news to softer, lifestyle and entertainment topics. Another development the newswriters found troublesome was the cross-promotion of products, programs and personalities from other corporate units. WABC-TV writers, for example, cited nightly reports about a stunt by magician David Blaine in advance of a prime-time network special. Writers at CBS stations objected to numerous interviews of personalities from network entertainment shows such as *Survivor* or *Amazing Race*, and missing person reports tied to the CBS show *Without A Trace* (Writers Guild of America-East, 2007).

The WGAE study found the news employees taking particular exception to the practice of airing VNRs – video news releases – video promotional stories from corporate, government or other interest groups. These stories are produced in the style of traditional news reports yet are designed as public relations tools. Television news

producers use these promotional videos because they are easily available, cost nothing, and require little work to include in a news broadcast. Many local stations will use health and medical-related VNRs, for example, as the cornerstone of their regular consumer health feature (Lieberman, 2007). A study by the Center for Media and Democracy found that 1) most VNRs are produced by corporate clients, 2) VNR use is widespread in the television news industry, 3) VNRs air in all local markets across the country, 4) stations do not supplement video provided by VNRs, and 5) stations do not verify claims made in VNRs. The FCC requires stations that air VNRs to identify the source. The CMD study found, however, that many stations actually disguise VNRs as original reporting (Farsetta & Price, 2006). Journalists might bear an ethical burden (Rosenstiel *et al.*, 2000) by airing VNRs as they might consider it equal to airing a commercial under the guise of news – another example of corporate cutbacks influencing news content. All of these editorial pressures are contributing factors in increasing journalist discontent.

We news types are mourning our lost autonomy and power. We're angry that, like everyone else, we're subject to business and financial pressures. Editorial independence has subtly eroded. Decisions about topics to cover (health, technology) are increasingly tailored to appeal to advertisers. Splintering media markets have weakened the economic base for newsgathering (Samuelson, 2007).

The discontent expressed by one respondent in the writers guild study reflected a certain degree of journalistic purity: “‘There are people dying in the world, serious conflicts going on, and we open WNT [*World News Tonight*] with the weather!’ lamented one

ABC member” (Writers Guild of America-East, 2007). Journalists, however, do not exercise their editorial judgment for their own benefit.

Journalism is practiced for the public good and audiences have information needs and preferences beyond social and political discourse. Papper’s extensive audience research (2007), for example, determined people distinguish between hard and soft news, and prefer hard news. It also revealed, however, that the top priority of local news audiences is, indeed, the weather. The juxtaposition of the ABC newswriter and Papper’s findings reflects the important differences between normative journalists and the public in the definition of news.

Technology

The revolution in mass communication began with the telegraph in 1854. The development of radio in the 1920s and television in the 1950s signaled the emergence of electronic journalism. Technology allowed television news to make a significant leap in the speed of coverage and the size of the coverage area with the development in 1974 of portable videotape cameras (Farhi, 2002), followed shortly thereafter by affordable live remote trucks. Slightly more than a quarter of a century later, satellite communications, the Internet, and a vast array of digital resources have created a media landscape that would have in no way been imaginable in the mid-19th century. Each new medium was borne of developments in technology.

Print media, specifically newspapers, dominated the social and political discourse in the United States until the mid-1960s. The development of high-speed printing presses allowed publishers to greatly increase the number of copies they could produce each day.

The telegraph drastically increased content available to publishers. These two developments combined to allow publishers to offer a wide and deep variety of content to a greatly increased audience. Inexpensive and readily available newspapers had the additional societal benefit of encouraging greater national literacy. The advent of radio had no substantive effect on the newspaper industry. However, as television transformed the political discourse and American society in general, newspaper circulation declined. The national newspaper *USA Today* was Gannett's response in 1982 to the challenge from television. Its shorter stories and large, colorful photographs were designed to appeal to an audience whose tastes were increasingly influenced by television. Although most local dailies have copied this new style, circulation continues to decline and only a few major metropolitan areas still have competing daily newspapers.

Radio enjoyed a brief but significant period of influence from the 1920s to the early 1950s. In the earliest days, most stations were independent and carried local entertainment programming and other broadcasts of local interest. The first two major networks were the National Broadcasting Company, founded in 1926, and the Columbia Broadcasting System, founded two years later. The networks provided their affiliated stations with live entertainment and public affairs programming. The medium's potential for compelling "current events" reporting was revealed with the explosion of the *Hindenburg* in 1936. Commentator Herbert Morrison's recorded description captivated audiences and made them "feel" as though they were witnessing the tragedy themselves. Radio journalism developed during World War II but waned because of the influence of television. Few traditional radio newscasts reach the public today. Public affairs and

political discourse are largely limited to so-called news-talk stations that feature partisan talk shows.

Television, as is radio, is first and foremost an entertainment medium. It has developed, however, an increasing public affairs aspect. In its infancy, the two major television networks, CBS and NBC, included 15-minute nightly newscasts. The programs were composed chiefly of an announcer reading items while sitting at a desk in a studio. These newscasts were expanded to 30 minutes in 1963 and increasingly incorporated film and self-contained stories from reporters in the field. Local stations also developed their own dinner-hour news broadcasts. In recent years, these local broadcasts have expanded from 30 minutes to blocks of up to two hours and more. The networks and local stations also program morning news and information shows. In many markets, one television news operation will serve two stations.

Nightly news summaries did not become the main focus of the broadcast television networks' public service efforts until their expansion in 1963. The networks, beginning in the 1950s, concentrated their journalistic efforts on prime time weeknight programs such as *See It Now* on CBS, and on Sunday morning panel shows. The prime time programs appeared with decreasing frequency until the mid-1980s, when the success of *60 Minutes* spawned various other news magazines on all broadcast networks. The development of cable television led to a vastly increased array of news and public affairs programming. These programs are many and varied, including traditional newscasts, business news reporting, entertainment news programming, true crime anthologies, and various talk and interview broadcasts. Some attempt to achieve traditional journalistic objectivity; others, increasingly, do not. Two popular cable

programs, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, have joined the electronic public affairs discourse by satirizing traditional electronic news reporting. These programs often feature politicians and media personalities.

The latest advance to affect the national discourse is the Internet, which is composed of various audio, video, text and photographic sources. The Internet is unique because of its open access and unlimited capacity – virtually anyone can secure space and include content. This has resulted in the democratization of the information discourse, which is often carried out as dialogue. Most non-professional participants, however, do not believe they are obligated to adhere to traditional journalistic standards of objectivity. Most traditional media outlets – newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations, and cable outlets – have incorporated this so-called new media technology into their operations. Despite the seemingly unlimited nature of this resource, there is very little original journalism generated by non-traditional media outlets on the Internet.

Redefinition by Cable

In the earliest days of network television newscasts, the first anchor and producer/director of the *CBS Evening News* had to dash each evening from the newsroom to the broadcast studio six blocks away, script and film in hand, to air nightly national newscast (Cronkite, 1996). Today, it is possible to witness an event, live, from any point on the globe and even from any point in the universe within reach of a camera lens. The innovation that allowed such a quantum advance in broadcast reach was the development of satellite technology. Satellites above the earth reflect electronic data in the form of audio and video signals from single, terrestrial distribution points to numerous receivers

back on earth. This technology has expanded viewer choice from a handful of radio and television stations to dozens of choices. Each commercial channel in this expanded universe must provide programming sufficiently compelling to attract an audience large enough to earn a sustainable share from a finite pool of advertising revenue. Many of these channels utilize relatively inexpensive news and information programming in the quest for profit. This has created a vast number of available hours filled by journalism in a wide variety of styles.

Former *CBS Evening News* anchor and managing editor Walter Cronkite viewed the clock as an “ever-present evil” (Cronkite, 1996, p. 366) for the lack of sufficient time to fulfill his nightly journalistic obligation. The clock might be considered equally evil today, but for the opposite reason – the vast amount of time that requires an unending flow of material to fill it. Postman and Powers likened news on cable television to a public utility – “You turn the faucet on and out pours the news” (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 56). Goldberg and Goldberg, citing the Cable News Network as an example, believe the greatest impact of cable technology is the recasting of the definition of broadcast journalism.

By appearing live, twenty-four hours a day, news on CNN had a compelling immediacy ... now news was an evolving story that happened right in front of the viewer’s eyes ... CNN transformed news into narrative by doggedly following events from beginning to end, and that appeal could be addictive (Goldberg & Goldberg, 1995).

This transformed content has led to what has been termed a stratification of television news. As the various cable “news” organizations pursue market differentiation, and as

traditional broadcast news outlets attempt to compete with the emerging outlets, significant differences have developed between the content of evening newscasts on the various all-news cable channels, and also between evening newscasts on cable channels and on broadcast television channels (Bae, 2000).

Traditional network news broadcasts, in the era before the advent of cable news channels, carried great influence in setting the political agenda. The broadcast networks still command a greater collective audience than all combined cable news channels. The cable news channels, however, have significantly weakened the agenda-setting influence of the broadcast networks by circumstance of sheer volume. Much of that volume, as a means to achieve competitive ratings, is often classified as “tabloid,” or sensationalistic, content. The reason is economic – cable must attract viewer attention by the moment. As cable is not “an appointment medium” as are the evening newscast on the traditional broadcast networks, cable news organizations value stories that can spike ratings, such as the JonBenet Ramsey murder case (Marks, 2006). The Project for Excellence in Journalism, in its 2006 survey on the state of the media, found that cable news “is thinly reported, suffers from a focus on the immediate, especially during the day, is prone to opinion mongering and is easily controlled by sources who want to filibuster” (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

The consequences for traditional, normative journalism programming have been significant. The definition of broadcast journalism has changed and the once bright line between entertainment and news had been dimmed (Breyer, 2003). Cable news organizations, to engage audiences for the purpose of achieving higher ratings, “make use of every existing taboo in the culture, including sexual perversity, irrational violence,

insanity, and the ineptitude of political leaders” (Postman & Powers, 1992, p. 150). In other words, the authors contend news has become entertainment.

The traditional broadcast networks have followed cable channels and programmed news magazine shows into the prime time schedule, the near-exclusive domain of entertainment programming. The reason is, of course, profit. News magazines are less expensive to produce and, therefore, do not have to attract as much advertising revenue to be profitable. The networks, additionally, as producers, own the rights to these programs and therefore can subsequently sell them in the lucrative syndication market. When news organizations replace entertainment programming with less-expensive news magazines without hiring additional personnel, quality suffers (What Does Quality Mean, 2002). These prime time news magazines often do not contain traditional news content. They are instead hyped and sensationalized, composed of real life murder mysteries, audience-friendly features, consumer news, and news you can use (Kimball & Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1994, p. 102).

The traditional broadcast networks have, at times, followed another common cable practice of extensive coverage of a developing occurrence, socially significant or not. The result is often giving the “breaking news” event more time and attention than it would normatively deserve. As Hewitt noted, “giving Elian Gonzalez back to Cuba caused a bigger ruckus in the United States than giving the Panama Canal back to Panama” (Hewitt, 2002, p. 239).

There are still fundamental differences between traditional broadcast network newscasts and much of the new information programming begat by cable technology. Traditional newscasts, despite a softening of content and style, strive to meet the

traditional, ethical standards of journalism of objectivity and truthfulness. Many of the information and talk programs on cable channels such as CNN, Fox, MSNBC and others often review the same “daily news” topics as presented in traditional newscasts. These programs, however, are noted not by traditional objectivity but by conflict and controversy. Viewers receive these partisan, opinionated “shoutfests” by the same delivery system as traditional journalism. Some viewers interpret these judgmental, sensational and non-traditional programs as “the news.” Former NBC News president and current Columbia University media and society professor Richard Wald used the example of CNN’s *Nancy Grace Show*, one of these new, non-traditional information programs, as being analogous to pornography. “‘The whole world will tell you that porn is horrible,’ Wald says. ‘But it is a multimillion-dollar industry that flourishes quite happily ... Someone will do something so egregious that it will become beneath our dignity and we won’t watch’” (Nevius, 2006). In the interim, a significant segment of the public will likely continue to consider traditional broadcast journalism and non-traditional cable programs as “the news,” virtually indistinguishable from each other.

Chapter IV

Methodology

UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTS

Qualitative methods may have the power to take the investigator into the lives and minds of the respondents, to capture them warts and all.

McCracken – *The Long Interview*

WBKB-TV, broadcasting on Channel 4 in Chicago, was in 1940 the first commercial television station outside the Eastern Time Zone. CBS bought the broadcast property from United Paramount Theatres in 1953, renaming it WBBM-TV, after the network's radio station in the same market, and moving it to Channel 2.

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, WBBM-TV's news product dominated the local ratings with an emphasis on serious journalism. With its anchor team of Walter Jacobson and Bill Kurtis, it was one of the most journalistically and commercially successful local news operations in the country. *Chicago Sun-Times* television critic Phil Rosenthal called it "the standard bearer of quality news, not only in this city but in the country" (Smith, 2000a). By the mid-1980s, a combination of personnel changes, a shift in focus, a libel case, and a boycott by African-Americans undermined the station's credibility and its ratings. WBBM lost its number one ranking in March 1986. Following a series of branding schemes and a shift to a flashier and lighter tabloid broadcast that had become the trend in the industry, the station's news product

became the lowest-rated in the market, often ranking below syndicated re-runs. It remained in that position for much of the 1990s.

In 1999, general manager Hank Price and news director Pat Costello made the decision to resurrect the station's image and ratings by once again placing the emphasis on solid broadcast journalism. It was, for Price, a solution of last resort.

Pat Costello and I were sitting down one day and I said, "You know we're both going to get fired, hehehe, it's just a matter of time" And he said, "Yeah I know, I know we are." I said, "Well Pat, you know what? We can do one thing, collect nice packages for severance and we'll go on with the rest of our lives, OR why don't we just say, a unique opportunity. We could really change the way we do the news, stop doing all the trite stuff, stop doing things just to be doing them ... but fundamentally look at the news in a different way. What if every day we had a group of really strong journalists who had been there a long time ... what if we put those people in a room every day and instead of having a regular meeting we talked and argued over what was a really important story and whatever was important go and cover that like crazy?" (Price, 2006)

News executives and editors developed a strategy and a format following a series of editorial meetings involving nearly every category of news employee. The product of this makeover was the station's late evening news broadcast.

The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin was different from most local news broadcasts in the country in both content and appearance. Editorially, the emphasis was on hard news and serious features. Its no-frills presentation reflected a stripped-

down, no-nonsense appearance. Its lack of banter between on-air personalities projected a serious tone.

As solo news anchor, Marin brought immediate journalistic credibility to the broadcast. She had been a longtime news anchor at rival WMAQ-TV, Chicago's NBC owned-and-operated station. Marin and co-anchor Ron Magers resigned in protest when, in 1997, under the leadership of Joel Cheatwood, the station adopted a tabloid style and hired Jerry Springer as a commentator. Following her tenure at WMAQ, her journalistic credits included reporting and producing news features for *60 Minutes II* on CBS.

The two key editorial voices on the program were Marin and Danice Kern, who was hired as assistant news director in advance of the format change. Marin and Kern, both advocates for traditional normative journalism, were largely responsible for all day-to-day editorial decisions. Two featured reporters of the broadcast were Mike Parker and Mike Flannery. Both were veterans of the WBBM staff. Flannery remains a widely-respected political beat reporter. Parker's expertise is political, government and investigative reporting. They, too, are advocates of traditional, hard television journalism. The broadcast also re-introduced an element long absent from traditional local television journalism – commentary. Two veteran journalists, Laura Washington and John Callaway, filled that role. Washington had a long track record in Chicago as an investigative journalist, reporter, editor and publisher specializing in issues of race, poverty and urban affairs. Callaway had 50 years of journalistic experience, including many years as a news executive for several CBS owned and operated news operations. He was, at the time, a principal reporter for *Chicago Tonight*, the nightly newscast

produced by Chicago public television station WTTW and highly regarded for its journalistic integrity.

During the development phase of WBBM's revamped newscast, the CBS network hired Cheatwood, the news executive whose decisions prompted Marin's resignation at WMAQ, as the executive in charge of the news operations for all of its owned and operated stations. Cheatwood's vision of local news was at philosophical odds with the direction of WBBM's planned changes for the 10 o'clock broadcast. Some of the principals believed Cheatwood's hiring indicated a lack of support from the parent network management, and believed their "experiment" was over before it even began.

Nevertheless, amid much fanfare and industry anticipation, *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* made its debut broadcast on February 7, 2000. Initial reviews for the program were highly positive (Hickey, 2001). The format was conspicuous for its lack of traditional local news formula. In an interview with PBS's Terence Smith (2000b), Deborah Potter, the executive director of NewsLab, the non-profit watchdog group that promotes quality in local news, termed it a "radical change."

I think it's atypical because it really is a radical transformation. It's not nibbling around the edges. They've reduced weather to a minute. They've allowed sports to move around during the half hour. If it's a big story, it's high up in the newscast. It may not appear until the very bottom. It's not formatted in the way that most newscasts are formatted (Smith, 2000b).

After a slight increase in ratings, the audience declined dramatically. Internally, there were complaints of inadequate funding, facilities and resources from the network, exacerbating the previously existing morale problem. Externally, there were complaints

that the broadcast contained too much heavy substance for its time slot. Amid impatient attitudes from the network, both Price and Costello left WBBM. The program aired its last newscast on October 30, 2000, three days before the start of the November ratings period and two days after Marin won an Emmy for excellence as an anchor.

The reaction to the program's cancellation from traditional, socially responsible journalists and from journalism academics was swift and most often negative. For example, the *New York Times* published a letter from Walter Cronkite who called the cancellation "disheartening to those many of us in television journalism who had hoped that WBBM-TV's format would be successful and lead the way to a wide adoption of more serious and informative news broadcasts" (Hickey, 2001). Many also noted that nine months was not nearly long enough to cultivate a commercially viable audience, as audiences are slow to change viewing habits.

Others, however, were not as laudatory of the program. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial likened *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* to castor oil. James M. Pethokoukis, writing in *U.S. News and World Report*, compared it to a "lump of coal... the broadcast's failure may say less about the public's appetite for hard news than about how that news must be presented" (Pethokoukis, 2000), p. 54). Kurtis, a co-anchor during the so-called glory days of WBBM's new operation, believed the broadcast sometimes left viewers feeling as though they were missing something. "The danger of a new alternative is that people don't think you're covering the news anymore, and they can't trust you to serve them with what is important or happening in the community. And so they'll go to someone else for the news" (Smith, 2000c). Project for Excellence in Journalism's extensive study of quality journalism and local television news, *We*

Interrupt This Newscast, included much more specific criticism. The report claimed *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was “news about political insiders for political junkies” (Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 103). The report found the newscast overcompensated in its attempt to eliminate news of routine crime and became what it reviled – a show filled with crime news, exchanging blue-collar crime for white-collar corruption. In short, the researchers said the program was poorly executed, cold, and aloof with unimaginative production and pedestrian writing. Such criticism would tend to counter the claim that the program was not given enough time, as deficiencies such as poor execution and pedestrian writing, when they exist at all in a television newscast, are easily remedied in a much shorter period of time.

In the commercial journalism marketplace, it is the market that ultimately decides the success or failure of a news product. In the case of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*, the market rejected the product. The theoretical basis for one possible reason is explored in the following section.

Researchers often examine certain behaviors of journalists quantitatively. It is possible, for example, to determine job satisfaction through survey research. It is equally possible to determine attrition rates of experienced journalists and whether or not job satisfaction might be related to these attrition rates. It is more difficult for quantitative methods to reveal possible reasons why a veteran broadcast reporter might be better able than a colleague to more easily deal with the additional stresses and demands of his job in the contemporary technological and economic paradigm. Quantitative methods have very little possibility of uncovering the fact that the reporter, for perspective, often compares the stresses of his work to his father’s job experience – getting a shotgun pressed to his

neck while working at a clerk in a convenience store. Such data provide a deeper, richer context into the understanding of job satisfaction and attitudes toward the demands of editorial managers. This type of context might allow researchers to understand why one reporter is better able to handle industry changes than others. Such concepts cannot be measured quantitatively. Such understanding can, however, be revealed qualitatively.

It is important to understand the attitude of journalists toward the new economic paradigm of the news industry. For example, one particular motive for entering the news business is public service – to “make a difference.” If such journalists believe business considerations make it difficult for them to make substantive contributions to the social discourse, they might begin seeing themselves as mere tools for generating corporate profits, no different from bankers, insurance agents and telephone solicitors. This would be at odds with their original goals and might be a contributing factor in any decision to leave the industry. Experienced journalists often serve as mentors for their younger colleagues. Veterans who leave the business deprive the industry of important resources – their experience, wisdom, guidance and leadership. Therefore, although it is important to quantify the attrition rate of veteran journalists, it is equally important to understand why they leave. Qualitative methods can provide that understanding. As McCracken reasons, “Without a qualitative understanding of how culture mediates human action, we can know only what the numbers tell us” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9).

Qualitative methods are valuable in developing possible explanations for why things happen in certain ways (Strauss, 1987). Qualitative research methods can reveal information about lives, experiences, behaviors, emotions, beliefs, organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena or any other concept that values

understanding instead of quantification. The essence of qualitative research methods is in their “nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). In short, the nature of the research problem itself dictates whether or not a qualitative method of inquiry is appropriate (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 9-10).

The nature of this study is to gain understanding into the reactions of journalists toward the changing news environment and the effects of increased economic responsibility. To gain such insight, it is necessary to understand their attitudes toward several concepts such as, for example, what normative journalists believe are qualities necessary for an “ideal” newscast, an understanding of their motives for becoming journalists, their previous work experience, relationships with colleagues, news managers, news executives and station managers, and a host of other variables.

The Qualitative Process

The major factor elevating a qualitative study from journalism to scholarship is the method of analysis. The constant comparative method, “the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” (Creswell, 1998, p. 64), provides the necessary structure for academic rigor. This method of evaluation “draws on both critical and creative thinking – both the science and the art of analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 434). An investigator will code data into theoretical categories as indicators of a type of event, behavior or attitude reflected by the participants – an “emic” perspective. “By making comparisons of indicator to indicator the analyst is

forced into confronting similarities, differences, and degrees of consistency of meaning among indicators” (Strauss, 1987, p. 25). The process continues until the categories are “saturated” – the data can provide no further insight into any category. After this process of open coding, the researcher links these categories around properties and dimensions reflecting an “etic “ perspective – the interpretation of the investigator. This axial coding allows the researcher to relate the categories to a central phenomenon. The following selective coding is limited to those codes that significantly relate to the central theme (Strauss, 1987, p. 32-33). This selective coding “presents a theoretical model of the process under study. In this way, a theory is built or generated” (Creswell, 1998, p. 161). In other words, this coding process organizes data into increasingly more abstract units of information and establishes a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 1998, p. 38).

The role of the researcher is critical in this process. Qualitative researchers must be open to the possibility of discovery, as this type of inquiry will ideally present opportunities to learn previously unknown concepts, relationships, or any other type of understanding not anticipated prior to the study. A perceptive investigator might find some of the more interesting and informative patterns of data along the margins of a study (Chenail, 1992). According to Denzin and Lincoln, “Qualitative research locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible,” and is “an attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). When accomplished with insight and creativity, such an exercise can provide understanding beyond the boundaries of quantitative methods. “In the end, the researcher’s theoretical explanations are fuller, more specific, and denser because properties and dimensions that

previously might not have been visible to the researcher become evident once he or she is sensitive to them” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 96-97).

The Long Interview

As the purpose of this research is the understanding of a specific phenomenon that occurred in the past, a qualitative exercise is preferable to quantitative inquiry. The circumstances of the object of the study, however, limit the type of method that could be effective. Participant observation, for example, is impossible for studying a past event. A survey study would likely limit understanding to the investigation’s preconception. The feasibility of in-depth interviews is often precluded by the lack of time on the part of potential participants. However, the qualitative research method that best lends itself to the conditions of this study is the long interview.

The long interview fulfills the criteria of academic rigor by allowing the researcher to achieve key qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context. Once academic integrity has been assured, the rest of the dynamic is an exercise in balance. The long interview gives access to participants within a reasonable time frame. In other words, the long interview takes advantage of the opportunity without taking advantage of the respondent (McCracken, 1988, p. 11-12). The time demands faced by such busy professionals were definite factors in this research. Four people who were recruited for the study did not answer inquiries. Another did respond but said she was simply unable to spare the estimated 60-90 minutes.

Once any objection to the time commitment is overcome, there are several aspects of the long interview that potential participants might find attractive. The session could

be seen as an opportunity to take part in a unique social encounter (Cannell & Axelrod, 1956; Caplow, 1956). It is an opportunity to have a substantive conversation with someone who is eager to listen to anything the participant has to say (Stebbins, 1972) and, in this case, has a similar frame of reference. Participants are empowered by the opportunity to tell their stories without the burden of any expectation on the part of the researcher. The long interview, in this particular study, gave participants an opportunity to add their own voices to a review of the “experiment” that has been long-debated and well remembered in the journalistic community. They also used the opportunity to review their own contributions to, and performance on, *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. For some, the interview seemed to be cathartic. These are all benefits anticipated by McCracken (1988, p. 28). One participant found the experience so positive he called a fellow employee on the telephone while in the midst of the session in an attempt to recruit him as a study participant as well. The participant also discussed participation with two other employees in the WBBM newsroom immediately after the interview ended.

The long interview is not without risks. One is the previously discussed time commitment. Another risk is privacy, especially in this particular study. *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was a highly-publicized endeavor involving a limited and defined number of participants in a high-profile milieu. As such, confidentiality was simply not feasible on any level. It is possible that lack of privacy precluded some members of two distinct groups from participating – former corporate managers and some current station employees. This is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Another risk is psychic demand. The interview sessions were demanding both emotionally and intellectually. All participants struggled to varying degrees with the accuracy of their recollections, especially when trying to recall instances of fact. One participant, a reporter, regretted not having the time before the interview to review tapes of his work during that period. (Another reporter did review several of his previous reports in advance.) All participants appeared very self-reflective, at times struggling to identify and analyze how they, personally, could have given the program a better chance of survival.

The journalists all had strong memories of many specific events, but the memories of the emotional toll seemed to be most intense for all of them. A majority, for example, offered the concept of “death” when recalling the program’s cancellation. This reflected the trauma many of them felt at the time, and the recollections themselves were often painful. One, former assistant news director Danice Kern, was especially agonized when asked about the possibility of accepting any future invitation to participate in a similar endeavor:

It’s the most frustrating thing I’ve ever come across. Trust me. Two, twice, I mean my heart was broken at NBC and it was broken again at CBS and shame on me if it’s going to be broken a third time ... I just don’t think I have the energy to do it again in Chicago, in that function, in that role. I didn’t. I couldn’t. I gave it my best shot twice. Twice ... I don’t revisit this too often ’cause it’s really kind of painful, believe it or not. You’d think that, big girl that I am, that I’d get past this (Kern, 2006).

It is a reflection of Kern's passion that she later discussed parameters under which she would consider doing it again. Passion for serious journalism in general and passion for their experiences with *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* were strong motivating factors for all for the journalists who participated in this study. They all proved to be, in this researcher's interpretation, people of professional substance and integrity.

The Participants

The purpose of a qualitative investigation is to gain a deeper understanding into a phenomenon. It allows researchers to explore values, attitudes, motives, reactions, feelings, and other intangible attributes that create a context for how and why something happened the way it did. It is not to attribute principles to the larger population. "How many," according to McCracken, is far less critical than "who," as fewer participants are preferable to more participants, as a preferable mix of people can provide a richer set of data. The issue is one of access. The purpose is to "gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world ... It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them ... It offers an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organization, and logic of the culture" (McCracken, 1988, p. 17).

The original purpose of this research was to understand the culture of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. The goal was to learn why the initiative was not a commercial success and, combined with qualitative data collected from key participants, develop theories of how normative journalistic principles might be

employed in a news program that could be successful in a commercial market. The first person contacted was anchor Carol Marin, as her cooperation appeared to be a prerequisite. After an introductory meeting in Chicago in January 2005, Marin agreed to participate and volunteered the names of several people who might also be willing to be interviewed.

Fifteen people were identified by their job titles and relative influence on the creation and production of the program. Those positions included a corporate manager headquartered, at the time, in New York, the two station general managers and the two news directors who served during the nine months of the program's existence, the assistant news director, the executive producer, an assignments editor, the anchor, the meteorologist, a commentator, producers, and reporters. Initial contacts were made by telephone call, followed by formal letters (*Appendix A*) and, in some cases, additional emails.

The people who declined to participate in the study did so for reasons summarized by the previously-stated risks. The major risk factor appeared to be confidentiality. All three managers who could be considered as being identified with the cancellation of the program declined to participate. One, through his secretary, originally claimed a lack of time. When pressed, however, the secretary admitted that the executive was not interested in ever discussing the program with anyone under any circumstance. A second manager was, during the course of two years, too busy to make time. A third never responded at all. Some of the potential participants still employed by WBBM indicated they had nothing to say or simply preferred not to discuss the program. The collective manner and tone by which they declined caused the researcher to theorize that they felt participation

might somehow not be in the best interests of their continued employment.¹ One former reporter, a current network correspondent, did not respond. The previously mentioned assignments editor, as noted, did not believe she could spare time for an interview. One former employee could not be located.

In all, six individuals were interviewed. It was a fortuitous mix of people. The group included the general manager who conceived the program, the two editorial “gatekeepers,” two reporters featured most prominently throughout the program’s tenure, and a veteran broadcaster who served as a commentator. These individuals represented an excellent cross-section of the editorial hierarchy from station manager to newsroom manager to reporter.

Hank Price, General Manager

Price was the general manager at WBBM-TV for four years, from 1996 to 2000. He left the station approximately five months after *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* began. It was Price who, after consultation with news director Pat Costello, decided to change the emphasis of the 10 o’clock news broadcast. Prior to his tenure in Chicago, Price was president and general manager of KARE-TV in Minneapolis and of WFMY-TV in Greensboro, N.C. He was also vice president for Programming, Marketing and Research at WUSA-TV in Washington, D.C. He previously worked as a consultant for the television research and consulting agency Frank Magid Associates. Since leaving WBBM, Price has been president and general manager of WXII-TV in Winston-Salem,

¹ The researcher contacted WBBM’s assistant news director to inform him of the study. After conferring with the news director, he said the station’s attitude was that it would neither assist nor discourage participation by any employee. He also predicted few of the very busy professionals on his staff would have sufficient time to participate. One employee originally agreed, enthusiastically, to participate before experiencing a change of heart.

N.C. He teaches in both the domestic and international executive training programs at Northwestern University's Media Management Center. Price was interviewed for approximately 75 minutes in March 2006 while sitting on the patio outside his office in Winston-Salem.

Danice Kern, Assistant News Director

Kern was the assistant news director at WBBM-TV during the period *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* aired. Prior to WBBM, Kern was a 15-year veteran of WMAQ-TV, the NBC affiliate in Chicago, rising to the position of acting news director. She resigned because of what she perceived as the station's deteriorating commitment to a quality news product. Kern, an advocate of normative television journalism, worked closely with Carol Marin while at WMAQ. Kern is currently a vice president of a Chicago accounting firm and a law school student. She has also published a book of poetry. Kern was interviewed by telephone for approximately 60 minutes in March 2006. Kern was in Chicago; the interviewer was in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Carol Marin, Anchor

Marin was the *de facto* managing editor of the show that bore her name. The program was built around her as a personality and was a reflection of her journalistic values. Marin and Kern provided the editorial guidance and served as the program's gatekeepers. Marin worked for 19 years at WMAQ-TV, resigning as anchor of the 6:00 and 10:00 evening news broadcasts in protest of the hiring of Jerry Springer as a news commentator. She has produced reports for *60 Minutes*, *60 Minutes II*, and the *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*. Because of her reputation as a serious journalist, Price

recruited Marin to be the centerpiece of the revamped 10 o'clock newscast. Marin and producer Don Moseley subsequently formed Marin Corp Productions, which has produced documentaries for cable news channels including CNN. She is currently political editor at WMAQ, a political columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and is a contributor to *Chicago Tonight*, the nightly news report on Chicago public station WTTW-TV. Marin was interviewed for approximately 60 minutes in November 2006 while in a conference room at WMAQ-TV in Chicago.

Mike Parker, Reporter

Parker is a 36-year veteran of the broadcast news industry. He has been a general assignment reporter for WBBM for 22 of the past 23 years. He was one of the featured reporters and often producing investigative pieces for *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. He was recruited for the program by Marin and considers himself an advocate for hard news. Parker previously worked an anchor, investigative reporter and general assignment reporter at KNXT-TV in Los Angeles, and as the news director and a reporter for KFI Radio in Los Angeles. Parker was interviewed for approximately 75 minutes in November 2006 while in his office at WBBM-TV in Chicago.

Mike Flannery, Reporter

Flannery has been the political editor for WBBM since 1980. He has won numerous state and regional awards for his reporting, many for his enterprise and investigative reporting. As Parker, Flannery was recruited for the program by Marin and was featured prominently on the broadcast. He considers himself a traditional broadcast news advocate. Prior to accepting his position at WBBM, Flannery served as a political

and labor reporter at the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Flannery was interviewed for approximately 70 minutes in November 2006 over dinner in the restaurant section of a Chicago health club.

John Callaway, commentator

Callaway has been a broadcast journalist for nearly 50 years. He has won dozens of awards, including a Peabody and several Emmy awards. He has a reputation for being a skilled and incisive interviewer. Callaway spent the first portion of his career at CBS Radio in New York and Chicago as program host, news director, and as vice president for all CBS all-news radio stations. He became national group correspondent for CBS Radio in the early 1970s before returning to Chicago as a general assignment reporter at WBBM. Callaway, who has been called the dean of Chicago broadcasters, joined public station WTTW-TV as news director in 1974 and has served in several journalistic capacities since then. He is currently a contributor to the station's *Chicago Tonight* broadcast. Callaway was interviewed for approximately 70 minutes in November 2006 at a diner on Chicago's North Side.

The Questioning

Although *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* is considered a commercial failure, participants might have reasons to define the program as a success. A qualitative inquiry allowed them the opportunity to explain the program's relative successes and failures from their own first-person perspectives. Those who participated in the broadcast on a daily basis became so completely immersed in the culture that it would

be impossible for an outside researcher to anticipate every possible element that formed participant attitudes about the experience. Therefore, a series of open-ended questions allowed participants the freedom to explore any avenue of recollection, yet allowed the researcher to retain structure for the inquiry. The researcher used an interview guide (*Appendix B*) to ensure each participant addressed the same issues while retaining the flexibility to explore individual topics and experiences as they arose. The guide was modified only slightly to accommodate the job function of each participant. The researcher was mostly a listener, guiding the discussion to certain topics while otherwise allowing the participant to freely recall events and experiences from the program. The sessions were analogous to a homeowner giving a visitor a detailed room-to-room tour, with the visitor ensuring all rooms were visited.

Two of the interviews were recorded on an analog mini-cassette recorder; four were recorded on a digital mini-disk recorder. All interviews were transcribed *verbatim* by a third party for subsequent analysis and coding. As communicators, all participants were predisposed to storytelling. The interviewer was aware of additional verbal and non-verbal cues that provided additional dimensions for interpreting meaning and gaining understanding from participants.

Reflexivity and Reactivity

The researcher in a qualitative investigation is as much a participant in a study as the subjects themselves. The researcher is actually an instrument, guiding the interviews and interpreting the encounters. As noted by Miles, “the investigator cannot fulfill qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of her or her own experience,

imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable” (Miles, 1979, p. 597). The researcher, therefore, brings an inherent bias into the process. Any such bias must be recognized. This researcher has a background of approximately 15 years as a broadcast journalist in both editorial and newsroom management positions. The advantage of such experience is a knowledge and understanding of the culture and language of electronic journalists. When a reporter, for example, referred to “doing a buck-twenty, a buck-thirty,” it was understood without further clarification that he meant producing a self-contained video report with narration of 80 to 90 seconds in duration. The disadvantage is a greater possibility of making assumptions in the use of that common language. The researcher was aware of the potential for such reflexivity and was especially conscious of cultural jargon and other assumptions that required clarification.

The researcher was not previously acquainted with any of the participants. Initial contact with each of the participants was for the purpose of this study. Any noticeable reactivity on the part of any participant appeared to be well within that person’s personality, as one was especially engaging and another seemed somewhat naturally reserved and taciturn.

An Expanded Focus

Qualitative research is most valuable when an investigator seeks detailed understanding of a condition or phenomenon. Creswell observed that “the final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (Creswell, 1998, p. 37). The original goal of this

study, as previously stated, was to use the commercial failure of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* to gain insight into what it would take to produce a commercially successful, journalistically sound program. Following the coding process, the data more appropriately reflected attitudes that addressed concepts beyond the specific program under study. The results revealed attitudes and concepts regarding journalism as a profession and as an industry, a direction actually preferred by the members of the committee directing and reviewing this study. As the data emerged, this critical dynamic centered specifically on newswriters. Therefore, although data collected from general manager Hank Price was valuable for historical background and context, his contribution was removed from the dataset. This shift in the scope of the research opened new stream of study leading to the identical goal – understanding the elements of producing a commercially successful, journalistically sound program.

Chapter V

Results and Analysis

THE NOBLE EXPERIMENT

If you could bring any kind of story to the audience, and as long as you did it well, good stories well told, you were achieving two goals. That was serving the audience in ways that it wasn't being served and at the same time fulfilling your role as a journalist which was to shine a light into, shine a light into places that require it.

Danice Kern – Journalist

I wouldn't have been so ostentatious. I think there was an attitude that maybe we all projected a little bit of, uh, eat your spinach ... We should have lightened up. We were not on a mission from God. I mean, we're doing TV news, for God's sake.

Mike Flannery – Journalist

This chapter is the researcher's interpretation of the recollections of the experiences of five people who made major contributions to *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. Using the Corbin and Strauss three-step model of constant comparative analysis, ten concepts emerged. Following this open coding, three axial categories emerged before the theme was recognized in selective coding. The ten emic categories that emerged from the open coding stage are "Carol as Leader," "Mission to Normative Standards," "Group Exclusivity," "Newsroom Culture of Despair," "Perception of Management Support," "Bad Journalism," "Good Journalism," "Program Successes," "Program Failures," and "Editorial Balance – Tradition and Competition."

The category of “Carol as Leader” emerged from data that clearly revealed Marin as the editorial heart and soul of the broadcast. Testimonials included expressions of admiration, respect, and even love. Every participant looked to Marin for editorial cues. She provided the overall editorial philosophy and daily leadership and guidance, which was not a substantial challenge as the editorial philosophy of each participant was very much in accord with hers. The many participant expressions of this philosophy were coded “Mission to Normative Standards.” Participants were aware that they were not only producing a product different than the standard of the time, but interpreted their position as being a direct challenge from morally superior ground. As such, they approached the “experiment” with the zeal of missionaries determined to fight the good fight regardless of outcome. The data reveals that participants, in assuming a morally superior position in opposition to prevailing standards, consequently viewed themselves as composing a separate and self-contained entity. Data expressing this characteristic of being “part of something very special” (Parker, 2006) was coded in a category termed “Group Exclusivity.”

The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin was created from a history of bad ratings. Persistent bad ratings – negative reinforcement of performance – can have a destructive effect on the culture of a broadcast organization. Participants offered examples of an ethos of institutional hopelessness from which the program was created. One participant described a survivor mentality permeating the newsroom. This data is compiled under the category of “Newsroom Culture of Despair.” The participants blamed corporate management instability, frequent changes in format, and a lack of resources as major contributing factors to poor ratings performance and battered morale. If the

participants were on the side of the angels, their opposition resided within corporate management. Data reflecting such an attitude were coded as “Perception of Management Support.” The term “perception” is key for two reasons. The first and most important reason is that participant perception is the focus from which they exercised the reality of their daily tasks. A secondary reason is the inability to secure comment from any member of management save Hank Price, the general manager who conceived the experiment and allowed it to proceed.

Any discussion of quality journalism would necessarily identify examples of good and bad journalism. Categories were coded as such. Participants considered many examples of common practices and techniques as “Bad Journalism,” including certain contemporary production techniques. They also were negatively disposed toward any element considered “consultant-driven,” citing a perceived uniqueness of the local Chicago audience. One element strongly identified as an example of “Good Journalism” was investigative reporting, as it fulfilled the watchdog function of journalism. The program, therefore, invested heavily in this type of editorial content. Participants also identified beat reporting and balance as two other elements of good journalism. Including balance as a concept of good journalism proved to be somewhat ironic as participants acknowledged, in retrospect, that the program oftentimes suffered from its lack.

Participants were universally proud of the work they produced for the broadcast. Examples of such work were coded in a category titled “Program Successes.” In reviewing past performance, it is a common trait for journalists to more thoroughly consider “what went wrong” as opposed to “what went right.” Participant interviews reflected this trait. Interestingly, some participants often used the word “fun” in

describing elements they considered successes, such as the opportunity for reporters to appear live on set to add further context to their stories. Other successes mentioned were the high quality of reporting, the dedicated effort exhibited by many members of the editorial and production crews, and the inclusion of commentary in the broadcast. “Program Failures” were considered extensively during participant interviews. Participants judged the experiment as a missed opportunity to demonstrate that exceptional journalism can, indeed, succeed in a commercial marketplace. Other comments reflected elements they judged as counterproductive to, or at least not consistent with, normative journalism may have contributed to the program’s cancellation. These comments were coded as “Program Failures,” as were comments blaming forces beyond their direct control – most notably a belief that “we didn’t get enough time to let them find us” (Flannery, 2006).

The tenth and final emic category is titled “Editorial Balance – Tradition and Competition.” The data coded as appropriate for this category are distinctly different from the data addressing editorial balance in the category titled “Good Journalism.” Such data included in the “Good Journalism” category specifically identified the concept of balance as desirable in the practice of good journalism. Data addressing the concept of balance included in the “Editorial Balance – Tradition and Competition” address balance as it applied specifically to *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. These data included qualities regarding editorial decisions, editorial expression and aesthetics.

In considering these ten emic categories, a certain pattern emerges. Each of these categories in some way relates to one of the three specific and distinct elements with which journalists regularly interact in the performance of their craft. The first of these

elements is management, which provides the tools and the opportunity necessary for journalists to perform their duties. The second element is the audience, without which there would be no reason to practice journalism. The third element is editorial philosophy, the process by which a news organization bases its editorial decisions. As such, these elements emerge as three etic axes in this study.

Table 1 - Open and Axial Coding

Normative Journalism	Management	Audience Focus
Good Journalism	Bad Journalism	Show Failures
Program Successes	Culture of Despair	Editorial Balance
Normative Standards	Perception of Management	
Group Exclusivity		
Carol as Leader		

As identified in the data, the emic categories of “Bad Journalism,” “Newsroom Culture of Despair,” and “Perception of Management Support” all contain negative connotations and elements that participants connect directly to the influence of corporate managers. This category exists under the heading of “Management.” Participant reflection reveals their perception of management attitudes toward the WBBM news operation, along with management decisions affecting the ability of newswriters to do their jobs, led to a newsroom culture steeped in failure and poor morale. The result of

these attitudes and decisions, in the view of the participants, was an organization that produced substandard journalism.

The data that compose the emic categories “Program Failures” and “Editorial Balance – Tradition and Competition” relate participant concern for fulfilling their mission to the audience. With that commonality, these categories combine around an axis termed “Audience Focus.” The editorial philosophy of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was one that espoused normative journalism as defined in this study. The emic categories of “Good Journalism,” “Program Successes,” “Mission to Normative Standards,” “Group Exclusivity,” and “Carol as Leader” are all elements coded as positive in the perceived mission of the participants. Therefore, these categories are related by the axis titled “Normative Journalism.” The balance of this chapter explores these elements in detail.

Carol as Leader

The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin was in every way, shape and form identified with anchor Carol Marin both within the newsroom and by the general public. Participants in this research, along with other staff members and observers with whom this researcher spoke, referred to the program as the “Carol Show” or the “Marin Show.” She was and remains the personification of this broadcast.

Marin established her reputation in Chicago as a no-nonsense, ethical, hard news journalist during her tenure as a main co-anchor at WMAQ-TV, the NBC owned-and-operated television station there. Two separate actions cemented her reputation for upholding the highest ethical standards. The first was her refusal to read copy that she

believed was not “news,” but sponsored material. That refusal resulted in a three-day suspension from her duties. The second was her resignation from WMAQ after 19 years at the station to protest the station’s hiring of Jerry Springer as a news commentator. As much as Walter Cronkite was associated with the concept of “trust,” Marin earned the brand of journalistic integrity. It also earned her great respect in the journalism community and among her colleagues, including reporter Mike Parker:

Carol’s reputation and her image was that of a principled, serious journalist. That was her persona, and it was legit. That’s who Carol was ... She is a woman of principle and a hard, strong, tough, tenacious reporter. I admire that about her. I absolutely do. She has scruples, and that’s good ... Everybody I know who knows Carol likes and admires Carol and respects her. I don’t mean to sound like I’m banging the drum for her, but I have a lot of respect and love for her (Parker, 2006).

Marin invariably carried that image and ethos to *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. Her reputation was a powerful attraction when the staff for the program was being assembled. Marin recruited all major editorial staff members personally and they considered the invitation an honor. As traditional journalists in an increasingly soft news paradigm, they saw the new program as a means to serve their profession in much the same manner – but with obviously less physical risk – as a soldier who believes he is serving his country. As a venerable veteran working a part-time schedule at public television station WTTW-TV, John Callaway indicated he agreed to participate only because it was Marin who asked.

My respect and affection for Carol is such that because she asked, I went over ... She talked me into it. It was almost like, “Oh, come on. Get with it.” And so I did (Callaway, 2006).

Mike Flannery was already on the staff at WBBM when the program was conceived. He was one of Marin’s key recruits among reporters. Both ratings and morale at the station at the time were exceptionally low and, to Flannery, Marin represented hope.

I admired her courage, uhm, you know, she had come over from 5 [WMAQ] after that – after the ignominious experience there ... we were hoping she could make some chicken salad out of the chicken feces that she had been dealt in that situation (Flannery, 2006).

Marin’s reputation combined with her position as the program’s only anchor – and, indeed, the program’s image – created an interesting management dynamic. Anchors at local television stations enjoy varying degrees of editorial input. A long-tenured anchor with strong journalistic credentials is more likely to have more editorial input than an anchor perceived by the editorial staff as merely a “newsreader.” In the case of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*, the anchor was inseparable from the program in both image and substance. She, in large measure, developed the editorial concept of the program and, on a day-to-day basis, acted as the *de facto* managing editor, a status developed in part by her extensive editorial input:

Nine in the morning, ten in the morning because you wanted to be there for the ten o’clock meeting to see what everyone was embarking on for the day. There was a two o’clock meeting, and then there was a seven o’clock

meeting, as I recall. So there were - to figure out what people were learning, to sort of help shape the direction of it, to figure out what else we could be doing. I mean, it was a very engaged time in that newsroom. And I was there for almost every one of those meetings (Marin, 2006).

Her influence on the program was indelible. Yet, as would be expected, the production staff also included editorial managers. The lead manager was assistant news director Danice (DAN-iss) Kern, who also had considerable editorial influence and, as she describes it, final editorial authority:

I was one of the developers of the format, one of the, I would say, one of the people who shaped the strategy, the brand, the program. I was one of the chief tacticians, implementers; I was kind of a utility player. I think I had a pretty big role in developing the program.

Q: Was there one person who would give a thumbs up or thumbs down to something? A: Often that was me (Kern, 2006).

Marin acknowledged Kern's editorial preeminence. The description of her own editorial role, however, reflects managerial authority usually reserved for the most accomplished and respected anchors. It was an appropriate and expected level of editorial control for Marin:

I mean, Danice was the management person who drove it, absolutely, and drove it well. She was sort of team leader, you know, someone who understood the people, who understood the process, who understood the news. I was very involved in that whole thing. There would be times when a reporter would come in with scripts, I mean, I went over every reporter's

script ... Went through all the copy, I read – wrote a lot of the copy, I read and wrote a lot of the copy. So there was all of that (Marin, 2006).

The perception of the reporters, however, might have been somewhat at odds with the actual editorial hierarchy. Reporter Flannery described a dynamic in which Marin was the primary editorial decision-maker, both during conceptual meetings in advance of the program's debut and on a day-to-day basis:

We spent the day, you know, debating what is news and how to, uh, how should this new show be framed, and Carol – Carol was steering the conversation, I think. And she had already made some decisions about what she wanted ... [On a daily basis], it was Carol – and Carol and Danice were often on the same page. And perhaps – perhaps Danice would defer to Carol, but it would – Danice would be part of the management team (Flannery, 2006).

The Marin-Kern management dynamic contained the potential for conflict but there is no evidence that any serious issue ever arose. One reason for the successful collaboration might be rooted in editorial judgment, as the two appear to be philosophical twins.

Marin appeared to carry that strong presence to the actual broadcast itself. It was a quality very apparent to commentator Callaway:

Uh, there was Carol Marin's penetrating style but a very gracious style. I would – how would we call it, a gracious no-nonsense. Uhm, in other words, I think there was as – from an anchor position, there was a presence that was way beyond reading a teleprompter ... She would do major live interviews with newsmakers that were considerably longer than

anything you would normally see on the ten o'clock news (Callaway, 2006).

Marin, then, was the editorial conscience of the program who appeared to translate her considerable reputation as a highly ethical, traditional, normative journalist into the image of the broadcast itself. This was one of the goals of general manager Hank Price when he recruited Marin for the program – a goal apparently achieved. Another of Price's goals was to create a journalistically sound program of which WBBM could be proud. It was a sense of mission staff members readily adopted.

Mission to Normative Standards

The staff of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* saw themselves as pioneers of a sort, and considered their initiative an experiment. They wanted to prove that it was possible in a market-driven journalistic environment to produce a commercially viable, traditional, normative news program. They accepted the task readily and, with full awareness that they were challenging an established paradigm, did so with a sense of mission. As the experiment proceeded and the ratings fell, many of the participants of this study acknowledged they were fighting an uphill battle that became increasingly quixotic. Many developed a belief that they would "fight the good fight" with honor for the duration. Reporter Parker recalled the invitation as being the opportunity of a career:

I remember her [Marin] coming to me and saying, "Look we've got this idea for a new show." She explained the concept and she said, "I get to pick the reporters that I want to work on the show on a nightly basis.

Would you like to try, 'cause I'd like to have you come aboard as one of the guys?" I thought this was a rare opportunity to do what I always wanted to do, which was real, serious, determined, aggressive journalism day after day, night after night. And I jumped at it. I said, "Are you kidding? Count me in. You know, I wanna be part of this" (Parker, 2006).

All of the participants made a point of saying they wanted to be part of an initiative that was unique, "not the same old news." They wanted to produce a different broadcast that addressed substantive topics in a contextual manner. Assistant news director Kern capsulized that attitude:

We were simply trying to do something that hadn't been done before in a long, long time, perhaps if ever. We were trying to do hard news but in a style, in a presentation format that arguably had never been tried before on a commercial television station in Chicago or for that matter in any other market... We didn't want to cover, you know, I don't mean to be pejorative when I say this but, you know, race around and cover the cheap murders and mayhem of the day ... fires just to cover fires. We wanted to do something special ... Who else was doing stories about public housing and transportation and architecture and world peace and disenfranchisement and power distribution and power plants and investigative stories and shining a bright light in all kinds of places in the city of Chicago that things never got told and trying to tell wonderful human stories at the same time? Who was doing it? Nobody (Kern, 2006).

Kern's motivation seemed purely Jeffersonian.

I believe that journalism – that includes broadcast journalism – does have a responsibility to the community that it serves. It does have a responsibility to inform, to expose, to reveal, to participate in the life of that ... It does this by reporting, by showing, by providing, by shining that bright light I talked about ... journalists cooperate in a democracy and foster a democracy because they provide that oversight function which is critical in a democracy which survives on a delicate system of checks and balances (Kern, 2006).

If the performance of the broadcast was assessed by the achievement of editorial goals, then *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* could be adjudicated a success. The staff developed the program as they conceived it and, as commentator Callaway described, produced individual broadcasts that were conspicuously different from most commercial newscasts:

It was different in exactly the ways that it was described. In other words ... the segments were longer when they needed to be ... There was multiple commentary. You didn’t see that anywhere else in television ... I think there was, from an anchor position, there was a presence that was way beyond reading a teleprompter. And so I think that manifested itself immediately ... And it was different in the selection of the stories that were chosen. If the other stations were going with certain what we’d call police blotter local leads, Carol would not necessarily lead with that if she thought the big story of the day and the more enduring story of the day was, say, an economic story ... She did a thing at the end of the program

called Grace Notes, which would be more culturally-oriented so that you might see and – and perhaps better written than you might see with other stations (Callaway, 2006).

Callaway talked at length about the concept of what he called “police blotter local leads.” Such “spot news” is considered a staple in local news programs for its sensationalistic presentation and its emphasis has been much criticized. Marin maintained that part of the program’s sense of mission was to change the way such crime news was reported by including an element of context, not to simply report individual and unrelated crimes:

We still believed in breaking news. It’s just that every murder, every stabbing, every elderly person accidentally driving through the window of a 7-Eleven was not – just because it was the latest or the most violent – going to be the lead of the newscast. And that was part of what we were trying to change (Marin, 2006).

That sense of mission, for most of the staff of the program, was limited to the performance of their job duties. Reporter Mike Flannery was the exception. He took the initiative to market the program beyond any station-backed promotional campaign, talking with newspaper writers but concentrating especially on radio:

I remember doing a number of radio interviews trying to build some viewership, trying to build the show up ... I did it on my own ... after that first burst of ratings, uh, it was clear that we needed to do something. So, you know, I worked my ass off for them. I bought in 110 percent ... I have a lot of friends in the business, and I called in favors to go do stuff on radio and sell the show ... If I could have, if I’d had the time, I would

have gone door-to-door. I would have said, “Hey, can I turn your TV to Channel 2 at ten o’clock?” (Flannery, 2006).

Flannery was smiling broadly when he said those final few lines to acknowledge the exaggeration. Shortly thereafter, however, that smile took on another character – possibly one of gallows humor – as he recalled how the sense of mission took on a desperate quality as the disappointing ratings showed no signs of improvement:

And, you know, even if the deck was stacked against us, which we had a sense of it being, and even if we had a sense that the wolf was at the door for the management team, that’s why they were doing this. They had said, OK, we’re gonna bet the factory on 36 red, roll the wheel. [Laughs.] It was so fun to do (Flannery, 2006).

Marin, in retrospect, understood that a major part of that sense of mission was to persuade the Chicago viewing audience to accept this new concept of local television news. The ultimate mission of any broadcast endeavor – regardless of motive – is to attract an audience. Marin was especially contemplative when she tried to add context to the outcome:

We didn’t create a perfect product, believe me. We had a lot to learn. And we would’ve evolved, too. But, if you think about the Kurtis and Jacobson model, which was, they were about to be cancelled when they finally caught fire after being together five years. Chicago’s a hard-won audience ... it takes a long time for this city to buy in that you really mean it, that you’re there, that they believe you, and once they do, you put down some roots ... So this is, this has been anyway, a news town that takes it

seriously and kind of, have standards by which they accept or don't accept (Marin, 2006).

The extraordinary challenges presented by such an ambitious goal heightened that sense of mission among the participants. But the belief that the experiment was a noble attempt to return normative standards to broadcast journalism brought an additional character to the group – similar but yet distinguishable from a sense of mission. It was the sense that they were members of a select group with a special sense of responsibility that bred an atmosphere of collegiality.

Group Exclusivity

The evolution of broadcast news has been well established in this study. Many of the changes associated with this evolution – those that changed the definition and character of news to a softer, less socially responsible model – were not welcome by veteran journalists. This is especially true for those journalists whose motivations included public service. Therefore, being recruited for an initiative such as *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was an honor. Journalists saw it as an opportunity to challenge all the things they believed were wrong with television news and help push the pendulum in the other direction by “doing things the right way.”

Being a part of such an initiative distinguished these journalists from their colleagues. They were an exclusive group, in a class separate from other journalists in the Chicago market, from others in their CBS ownership group, and even from the colleagues in their own newsroom. Reporter Parker appreciated from the beginning being a part of a group that could strike a blow for good, solid journalism:

I think for those of us who were working on the broadcast, it was like an injection of some kind of energy drug. I mean, it was something wonderful. We all felt privileged and honored to be part of this thing. We all believed in it ... It was really the way a newsroom oughta work with a dedicated group of news people that love the news as I do and just really wanted to kick ass with their stories (Parker, 2006).

The competitive milieu of a major market television newsroom is not always conducive to collegiality. It is not uncommon for reporters to be protective of their stories and sources, and for producers to be territorial regarding their broadcasts and various editorial responsibilities. There is no evidence indicating these conditions were present among the crew of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. On the contrary, their sense of exclusivity seemed to cultivate what Parker called a group process that seemed almost “communal.”

We all felt like we were part of something very special, we all wanted to be part of that. I mean, we all would share ideas, too. If Flannery was working on a story on Wednesday and I had a notion for him how he might follow it up on Thursday, I would say, “Hey, Mike, here’s what I know about this part of your story. Maybe you could follow it up and do that.” And very often that would be the case ... It was a real collegial kind of relationship that the reporters had with one another and also with Carol. It was just about as good as it gets (Parker, 2006).

This collegial atmosphere extended to assistant news director Kern, the program's senior manager, who seemed to believe the group's sense of mission superceded any intramural rivalry:

I feel that there was sort of a creamy nougat center or let's say there was a nuclear fuel rod of a few people who really lived and breathed it and embodied it. And burned white hot all the time and really, really participated hugely and that was the core and yes I was part of that, yes.

Carol of course was (Kern, 2006).

Parker reflected more of a combative attitude borne of moral, or at least journalistic, conviction. To him, it was very much an "us against the world" dynamic:

God, we wanted to show everybody that doing it the way we felt was the best way could work, when everybody said it wouldn't. Everybody laughed at us and said, "Oh, are they barking up the wrong tree, and this is gonna go nowhere." We wanted to prove them wrong (Parker, 2006).

The combination of an exclusive group and a sense of mission can translate to an aura, intended or otherwise, of moral superiority. That would not be a welcome aura for people outside of that exclusive group. The ten o'clock newscast was just one of several daily programs produced by the entire news staff. Such a separatist attitude was all but destined to produce a schism in the newsroom. Flannery described some poorly considered remarks that exacerbated the situation:

I think it might have been [news director Pat] Costello, who was fairly plain spoken. He actually said a phrase that he, I think he lived to regret. He said, "You know, I have only so much food, and I have all these

children. I have to feed my ten o'clock child, and the other children will just have to get by." And so the people who were doing those shows were not happy campers. All the resources were going to 10:00 and to Carol and to us. So there was factionalism, yeah. Not without, you know, there was some unhappiness, even bitterness perhaps. Not without cause (Flannery, 2006).

Parker recalled an undercurrent of discontent and resentment on the part of other newsroom staffers. Kern, however, recalled it as being more than an undercurrent but an attitude that sometimes affected news coverage:

I also think that there were a couple of key people in key roles, who were in very key roles, I would never say sabotaging it but being sort of passive aggressive about it in the sense that, well they said we're not going to cover breaking news and then deliberately ignore it ... If they didn't aggressively say I don't buy into it and I won't help make it work then it was sort of passive-aggressive like I'm going to straddle, I'm going to keep one leg on both sides of this. I'm going to be a quiet critic and quietly sabotage it from time to time while at the same time you know being, you know, going along with the program publicly (Kern, 2006).

The manifestations of the schism intensified as the ratings for the program fell and eventually leveled off at an unacceptable low. The managers who conceived of the show, general manager Price and news director Costello, left the station, stripping the program of their management protection. This, according to Flannery, emboldened newsroom "snipers." And Marin, herself, felt a deep sense of vulnerability for the experiment:

And I think we were, you know, a hardy band of people really with very high hopes that we could pull this off, and we felt the responsibility of that ... And then after about four months, we were a hardy band on what we knew was a sinking ship, because we'd sort of been cast out to sea, and, you know, the captain and the first mate were gone (Marin, 2006).

The feeling of being on a sinking ship seemed to deepen to a deathwatch. The participants, during their interviews, repeatedly talked about the cancellation of the program in terms of an actual death. They seemed to sense the end might be coming even though it was somehow not real and, therefore, left them unable to brace themselves for it. The trauma they experienced seemed to reflect that of an actual death. This was a group of people who had high hopes of reversing an established trend in broadcast journalism. The participants indicated it was one of the best experiences, if not the best experience, of their professional lives. And it disappeared in an instant. Parker, in his interview more than six years later, still seemed mournful:

We all believed in that thing. I mean, we really believed in it. We genuinely did. And when it died, it was like, it was like a friend had passed away. It was a very sad turn of events. And it made a lot of us kind of angry, too (Parker, 2006).

Flannery's reaction was similar:

It was sad when – it was sad when it all died. And as you – as you mention these names now, it all comes flooding back. I think I've repressed some of these ugly memories. That's just painful for me (Flannery, 2006).

Flannery's grieving process, however, was delayed. As the station's political reporter, he was on the road covering the last stages of the 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. As the election extended into December in Florida courtrooms, the only substantive difference in Flannery's routine was the request to produce shorter pieces. The cancellation did not seem real until he returned to Chicago. The delay seemed to intensify his sense of loss:

I finally settled down and accepted it and I thought about it – it was in that Christmas season there, 2000. I mean, that was when it finally sank in on me. It was really painful when this – when this thing died out. I was very depressed for quite a while (Flannery, 2006).

As with many deaths, time heals the wounds and, unless the scab is picked at – as these interviews seemed to do for these participants – eventually the memories that remain are mostly pleasant and positive. Kern remembers the experience, frustrations and all, as a high point in her career:

I still believe it was one of the finest examples of collaborate, creative collaboration I have ever been honored to be a part of and I do believe it was, however Pollyannaish this may sound, one of the finest things I've ever done and one of the noblest. I don't apologize for that (Kern, 2006).

Kern's recollection is especially positive in light of the situation she found in the newsroom when she was hired in the weeks preceding the debut of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. The news department Kern walked into was a far cry from the glory days of the Kurtis-Jacobson era.

Newsroom Culture of Despair

It is notable, considering the morale in the WBBM newsroom in late 1999, that *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was able to generate any excitement at all among employees. The news operation had suffered a series of embarrassments since Bill Kurtis and Walter Jacobson led the CBS-2 news operation to critical and commercial acclaim. The effect on the staff, according to some of the participants in this study, was debilitating. Multiple formats and management teams, they said, had caused many of the staff members to simply give up. Parker characterized the news staff as being “shell shocked. What’s the old line about, ‘I feel like a survivor of nuclear war? It’s great to be alive but I’d rather be among the dead.’” Some other participants in this study indicated the prospect of a format change prompted a positive reaction in only a handful of the employees, and only among those who would work directly on the program. Marin cited institutional instability as the reason:

There were so many different experiments, and so many different general managers, and so many news directors. If you were going to endure that, you had to toughen up your skin pretty thoroughly and keep your head down. Which is why I think some people who were there may not be talking to you, because, I mean, the goal line here is for them to keep their jobs. But it was, I think, you can’t change that many times, have that many different mission statements, that many variable visions, that much change in personnel, and feel very secure in your own situation (Marin, 2006).

Kern, as the most recently hired employee at the time, saw the newsroom through slightly different eyes. Her emphasis was on a management that seemed to consider the newsroom chiefly as a source of revenue:

This was a neglected piece of broadcast property, and it was being milked and milked and milked until that cow would not give any more milk. Not for once should you underestimate the effect of people's morale. You know, it was like walking into a room full of abused kids, forgotten kids. They had been starved and abused and beaten up and sort of left in the dark to do their own thing ... This [was] a newsroom that hadn't done routine performance evaluations in quite some time. Here's people who didn't even know what they were doing, who they're supposed to report to, whether they're doing a good job or not. That's the newsroom I came into. And here we are, the new vanguard with high morale and high spirits and high principles, high energy and what were they? Of course they were skeptical (Kern, 2006).

Newsroom employees might not have had the benefit of feedback from management, but management was nonetheless a large presence in the newsroom. Kern outlined the reason above – a perception of a lack of support. Issues with corporate and station management compose a greater amount of data from the four participant employees² than any other topic. Those issues are explored in the following section.

² John Callaway was not a full-time employee of WBBM at the time. As a commentator, he was considered a free-lance contractor.

Perception of Management Support

It is not unexpected that management would be a focus of conversation among employees of any company. Management priorities, goals and decisions affect employees of in all organizations. WBBM management, both local and CBS corporate management, is no different. In this research, participant comments regarding management fell into two categories – the level of management support for the news department, and participant attitudes toward management.

Management and news workers alike seek success, with success usually measured by viewership or ratings. The differences are in definition and motivation. Editorial employees tend to view ratings as an indication of job performance – higher ratings would therefore be considered a job well done. Management is responsible for generating corporate profits and therefore translates ratings success into revenue. Kern acknowledged as much:

Of course you want to be Number One. Of course you want to be rewarded with the eyeballs and ear balls ... who doesn't for God's sake. But, and of course you want to see this manifest, this acclaim manifest in ways that are oh-so meaningful to general managers, you know, and ad dollars that come pouring in, of course (Kern, 2006).

This investigator sensed in Kern a twinge of sarcasm or possibly distaste when she referred to general managers. Kern, a news manager herself, seemed to identify much more closely with the editorial responsibilities of her position than with growing viewership for the sake of corporate profit. She seemed to resent management assigning

profit expectations to the newsroom, and she retained an older financial model of news departments:

I think its unfortunate that newsrooms are part of profit-making juggernauts in some way because there is such a high financial bar to meet every single day, every single month, every single year ... And let's also face it, news is, it's not the profit center of a television station, it's the cost center. It doesn't generate any revenue. It's the integrity, the strength, the identity of the news organization that brings in those ad dollars (Kern, 2006).

There was a universal belief among study participants that management adequately supported neither the news department in general nor the ten o'clock show in particular. All participants cited a lack of personnel, insufficient promotion, and an inadequate studio set as hampering the program's success. Flannery specifically singled out the lack of radio promotion and an absence of transit advertising as being especially damaging. Marin noted that a lot of the program was produced "by the skin of our teeth." Parker, interviewed in his small office, was especially critical of the set, believing it reflected management's lack of commitment for *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*:

The set was a very small construction. It wasn't much bigger than this room. It was a little desk and a couple of chairs ... In retrospect, I am wondering if perhaps they didn't do it on the cheap, figuring that this was something that could blow up in their faces and it may not work. And better to do it comparatively inexpensively in terms of a new set, instead

of spending, you know, three hundred fifty thousand, four hundred thousand dollars on some grandiose circus tent affair (Parker, 2006).

Kern, of all the participants, was the most vociferous in condemning management's level of support. She decried the department's "serious infrastructure problems," claiming it compelled her to ask personnel to compensate for the lack of resources by being "as creative and resourceful as humanly possible and to do the best with what they had." Kern recounted her own efforts:

For months and months and months I can remember going in almost every weekend because a computer system had crashed or because a system that drove [video] playback on the air inexplicably died. Can you imagine that?

We had so many problems that would take and occupy the time of any news manager. We had to fix all of those and change morale and launch a new show and bring up ratings at the same time. It was unbelievable.

Lots and lots of dispirited people, very little capital improvement (Kern, 2006).

It is no small irony that the two people who conceived of the original idea of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* were the station's general manager and news director. Although they created the opportunity, general manager Price and news director Costello were targets of a certain measure of criticism. The major objection was that both executives resigned within months of the program's debut. The timing fueled speculation that both managers were forced out, although Price had publicly asserted he left for a more attractive situation. Marin said Price "increasingly was not proud of the way news was going and really wanted to make a mark and make a difference" (Marin,

2006). She called him the central lobbyist for the program and agreed to devote her ethos and effort to it only because of his commitment to a quality news product. Marin, however, insisted she would not have accepted the challenge if she foresaw a particular management change on the corporate level.

During the development of the program, CBS hired a new vice president of news for all owned-and-operated stations. That new executive was the same manager who hired Jerry Springer as a news commentator, the action that prompted Marin to resign from WMAQ. That executive was Joel Cheatwood, whom Marin had previously characterized as “the poster child for the worst TV has to offer” (Hickey, 2001, p. 16). One industry observer called the hiring “a stroke of Dostoyevskian irony” (p. 17). During the interview for this research, Marin said she knew the program was dead before it ever aired its first newscast:

My lowest moment was finding out Joel Cheatwood had been hired. I knew we were gonna get killed. I mean, it’s just a matter of when. I just tried to keep putting it behind me. But that spelled the end of the game for me. I told Hank on the phone that night, “Why would I do this?” And he said, “Because I will keep him out of Chicago, and I have already made that clear that he will not oversee things in Chicago” ... I believe in taking risks. I don’t believe in being silly ... You do things when you have – you believe you got a chance of pulling it off. And when Hank Price left and was no longer there to defend us, then it was just, we just waited for the day they told us the plug was being pulled (Marin, 2006).

According to participants, Cheatwood never announced any quantifiable goals for the *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. Neither did Price and Costello nor their successors, general manager Walt DeHaven and news director Craig Hume. Regardless, the new team abandoned the format nine months into the experiment after ratings leveled off at a non-competitive level. The study participants, accurately or not, perceived management as demanding a substantial, short-term improvement. Such dramatic increases are all but unheard of in local television news because audience habits are exceptionally slow to change. Kern compared dramatic ratings increases to “an extraordinary lining up of the planets” (Kern, 2006). Callaway compared movement in television news ratings with trying to turn around “a great big ship in a narrow channel, and boy, it takes a long time” (Callaway, 2006).

Study participants universally agreed the program was not given enough time. (Price had promised to stick with the format for a minimum of a year, a commitment the new management team apparently did not believe it had to honor.) The most common terms participants used were “not given a chance,” “it was a work in progress,” “there wasn’t enough time for the audience to find us,” and “the show could have been saved.” The frustration about the early cancellation was exacerbated by the lack of promotion. Another aggravating factor for Parker is the realization that subsequent formats have not been any more successful:

The newscasts that are on the air at ten o’clock here today have, for the last four or five years, been consistently getting lower numbers than (we did). What does that tell you? I don’t know. The glitz isn’t making it. The super-produced, super-rehearsed, let’s-not-be-real kind of approach isn’t

making it. So I think it was a matter of giving that one a little time and tweaking it a little bit (Parker, 2006).

There are instances in which events and circumstances have converged in favor of a broadcast news organization – for example, CBS News and the assassination of President Kennedy as previously discussed. Marin, during her interview, pondered the possibilities had the show been able to hang on for an additional 11 months to coincide with another cultural shift:

I still believe if we had been on the air when [the terrorist attacks of] September 11th occurred, we would have had more time. We went off the air before September 11th and I went fully back to the network. But I think that would have given us more time and additional impetus to do what we did, or were trying to do anyway (Marin, 2006).

Notably, Parker and fellow reporter Flannery both made a point of saying they have never paid attention to what Flannery called “the damned numbers.” Both presented themselves as being antagonistic to ratings in general. They also made definitive assessments of managers based on their perceptions regarding an individual manager’s journalistic philosophy. Managers they perceived as adhering to the trusteeship model gained their favor. Both regarded Costello, for example, very highly. Market-driven managerial style prompted their antagonism and sometimes their derision. Parker, in particular, reserved special venom for those managers who lacked a certain level of journalistic ethic. “A lot of the managers and producers and editors in those days [before the Marin program] were such, frankly, such flaming idiots that I don’t know that I would have been able to countenance sitting in a meeting with them.”

Flannery and Parker were again of one mind regarding the Marin program's highest-ranking manager. They both praised Kern highly as "wonderful" and "supportive," saying she "walked the walk." Kern, for her part as assistant news director, said her managerial duties often compelled her to work 14-16 hours a day, seven days a week, usually to handle the frequent previously-mentioned newsroom crises. Throughout the interview for this research, Kern consistently revealed what appeared to be a deep sense of responsibility not just to the program as a whole but also to the people, the individuals, who contributed to it. She seemed to see herself primarily as a traditional broadcast journalist, but was also aware of the financial constraints inherent in the dynamic. "We can't survive in the business without understanding them, of course you get them," Kern (2006) said. "You know what the constraints are. You know what you got, the deck you've got to play with."

The two reporters seemed mildly critical of Price, the man who made possible *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*. For Parker, however, the antagonistic attitude toward broadcast managers in general seemed especially strident:

I've never hung out with management. That's just not what I do. I've often said, "I don't wanna be their friend." You know, I don't wanna be the pal of the general manager. I've seen too many guys become friends with the general manager and then get knifed on the back by the general manager. I don't wanna see that happen to anybody. Certainly not to me. So I would just as soon keep everything on a very business, keep it all on a very professional level (Parker, 2006).

Reporters would not generally interact on a regular basis with general managers. They are greatly affected, however, by the market-driven decisions general managers make regarding their news operations. The next section explores how those decisions are often perceived as being at odds with the goals of traditional normative journalism.

Bad Journalism

The participants in this study shared examples of what they believe to be bad journalism. Considering only the examples they offered, nearly every instance could be traced to a management decision that had an economic justification, such as minimizing newsgathering costs or instituting production and performance devices designed to appeal to viewers. The pattern remained consistent for recommendations from consultants who might be regarded as management surrogates. Some of those devices are a style of video photography that incorporates noticeable camera movement (sometimes known as “Shaky-cam”), live remote reports for no apparent journalistic reason, and displaying multiple sets of graphics on the screen during newscasts. (The latter device was pioneered by Joel Cheatwood for CNN Headline News.) The use of multiple graphics is one of two devices Parker finds especially irksome:

When was the last time you saw a really wonderful graphic on *60 Minutes*? They don’t use them. There is no such thing as a graphic, not even a freaking super [electronic title] across the person talking. They don’t use them. And I guess that show has been an abject failure because of that, hasn’t it (Parker, 2006)?

The other device to which Parker most objects is the walking stand-up, a suggestion that news consultants first began recommending in the 1970s. A walking stand-up involves a reporter incorporating movement – often by walking from one place to another – while addressing the camera during a report. Parker, sounding predisposed against consultants, reacted to such a suggestion with antagonism:

These guys [consultants] would come in and order us to walk and talk and dance and sing. And I remember saying to one of them, I said, “You know, I got news for you.” I said, “I don’t care what this means, but I’m one of Jerry’s kids. I can’t walk, and I don’t walk, unless it is absolutely necessary” (Parker, 2006).

Flannery, as a political reporter who believes context and nuance are essential in his specialty, takes issue with time limits of 80 to 90 seconds per taped report. Callaway had deep ethical problems with the airing video news releases under the guise of news. Kern, in describing examples of bad journalism, said, “Don’t franchise it, don’t homogenize it, don’t pasteurize it, don’t pander to the audience, don’t be a news pimp. And that’s what I think most local news is day in and day out.” Marin was especially disgusted with what she called “ratings stunts” as being completely devoid of any shred of journalistic content. She used a personal example to make her point:

A stunt would be Jerry Springer. A stunt would be a cynical attempt to pop your audience numbers during a rating period, when you had absolutely no interest in commentary, but you were doing it just for the eyeballs (Marin, 2006).

If all participant examples of bad journalism can be connected to a market-driven source, it is reasonable to expect their examples of good journalism are parallel with the trusteeship model of journalism. Those results are explored in the following segment.

Good Journalism

The study participants universally agreed that the concept of “balance” was an important element in good journalism. The concept as they described it was within the context of individual newscasts. In addition to reporting the traditional “news of the day,” the participants also responded that newscasts should reflect the tone and character of the community. They specified festivals, pageants, the arts, and ethnic celebrations as examples. Callaway identified “beat reporting” as being an essential element in good journalism. Kern included “light notes” and “reflections of humanity” in her examples. And the news manager believes deeply in the role of journalist as societal watchdog. Kern used the phrase “shine a light into places that require it” in describing a journalist’s primary responsibility:

We are, our ethic requires us to take a look at our policymakers and our government, to shine a light there, our courts. But also into aspects of our society, corporate America, the arts, education, and to do those things (Kern, 2006).

For purposes of clarity, Kern singled out society, corporate America, the arts and education not for superficial news coverage but for critical review; these areas should also be subject to journalistic illumination.

Marin, the program's co-editorial conscience with Kern, expressed a balanced newscast as being "something that you are at least 51 percent proud of." She explained that newspapers and television news programs report many things with which she, herself, might not immediately identify but others in the audience might:

But as long as a majority of it is serious, useful information, and is in fact news as opposed to stunts or things that are in some way advertiser-insinuated, pretending to be news, then I am good. We can cover some government, if we can cover some local events, if we can do some culture—I mean there is no specific formula for me as long as it's serious and it's done in what everyone would agree is sort of along – or what everyone generally agrees follows a journalism code of ethics (Marin, 2006).

It is noteworthy that Marin believes there is "no specific formula" to good journalism. One of the goals of *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was to follow no particular formula from one night's broadcast to the next. It is a goal the program appears to have achieved. The next section examines elements the participants judged as successful.

Program Successes

It is no surprise that the data coded in the category of "Program Successes" closely resembles the data in the category "Good Journalism." Participants were proud of the work they produced for the program. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that they judged their successes against their perceived standard of good journalism. The

participants, however, devoted the least time during the interviews to discussing the successes of the program. One possible explanation reflects an attitude not uncommon among journalists. Editorial personnel have a tendency to concentrate more of their efforts on their shortfalls and deficiencies for the purpose of improvement. This is evidenced by the common practice of *post mortems* immediately following many news broadcasts. The purpose of these meetings is to review good and bad aspects of that particular newscast for the purpose of improving future newscasts. In practice, the majority of time and effort in these meetings is spent addressing failures and deficiencies. Successes are understandably seldom targets for improvement.

Participants were especially enthusiastic when discussing elements of the program they perceived as successful. Reporters Flannery and Parker both used the word “fun” when discussing positive aspects of the experience – a notable element in two veterans who can measure their experience in decades. Both highly valued the luxury of time to develop and report in-depth stories – time for preparation and in the duration of individual reports. Both also appreciated “debriefs,” the practice of answering questions from the anchor on the set for the purpose of expanding or explaining an aspect of the story. As Parker explained it:

We were lucky in that we were able to talk [on the air] with her about the pieces we were doing and take it beyond what was in the actual story itself, talk about the ramifications of it and what might happen next and what the real reasons were for one of the individuals in the story to do what they did (Parker, 2006).

The reporters also participated in daily editorial meetings to help plan news coverage for the day. This is something neither had done previously. They said their input was solicited and believed it was taken seriously, giving them an additional measure of ownership in the program. Callaway believed the greatest success of the program was the strength of its reporting:

You have excellent political reporting. Mike Flannery, world-class local political reporter. Mike Parker's very good in that area also, but Flannery owned it. And she showcased him on the ten o'clock news in a way that he had not been showcased in previous years. And that was good. That's exactly what – that – his reporting plus Carol's questioning and her own reporting, distinguished that broadcast (Callaway, 2006).

Marin's view of the program's successes was framed somewhat differently. As Callaway had, she emphasized the program's strength of reporting, especially its high level of storytelling. Marin also admitted to keeping a catalog of stories the program broke and the newspapers had to follow – an accomplishment that is a particular source of pride for many broadcast journalists. She was proud that the program included commentary and showcased longer sports features. But in describing the program's successes, she tended to frame them in terms of people – staff members – not individual program elements:

There were lots of wonderful reports. John Callaway was stupendous. I knew that if he did it, he was applying his equity to us. And it was a really bold thing for him to do, and I would always be grateful to John Callaway for taking this risk with us. And Callaway was fearless in trying to stretch

his own boundaries, and to say things, and to give opinions, to provide context. And that was a great moment. I think Danice is the best producer and best news director I have ever known. That was a great moment.

Working with Parker and Flannery – who are fine reporters – all of it. A lot of it was behind-the-scene stuff, people who worked so hard to make that show look good. So, you know, from my standpoint, the positives vastly outweigh the negatives (Marin, 2006).

Many serious broadcast journalists all over the country were, in fact, followed the Marin experiment and hoped it could succeed. Regardless of what might be considered the program's journalistic success, however, broadcast programs are ultimately judged by audience size and longevity. The Marin show did not command an audience large enough, as judged by station management, to survive any longer than nine months. The reasons, as perceived by the participants of this study, are examined in the following section.

Program Failures

In contrast to discussions regarding successes, participants in this study invested considerable time and thought into what they perceived to be failures. The participants were unanimous about several topics – a sense of lost opportunity, a desire that they could have “done more,” a wish they had been afforded more time to attract a larger audience, and a feeling that they “couldn’t overcome forces” that seemed to be working against the program. All participants emphatically stated they were glad to be a part of the effort regardless of the outcome.

Each participant also offered specific elements that might have hurt the program – or at least reflected the impression of being a negative. Parker noted that the program, in the eyes of the audience, might have started from a deficit position because of the many format changes since the Kurtis-Jacobson era. “By then,” Parker said, “we had burned up whatever trust and links that we had with the audience.” Parker regretted changes that might have been beneficial to attracting a larger audience, such as a more attractive studio set, were never tried. And despite being personally in favor of the device, Parker conceded that on-set reporter debriefs might have been more effective if used sparingly:

Maybe we did too much of that. One of the critics said that it was like the reporters were a group of school kids giving their report to the teacher and then waiting for her approval. Or being grilled about - before grading it.

“Do I get an A or do I get a B-minus, Carol?” Maybe in terms of the audience, maybe that’s how some people may have perceived it. I never felt that way (Parker, 2006).

Kern singled out the set itself as being a negative, saying it was an element in an overall “look” that might have needed upgrading:

A desk is not going to make or break you. But as you know there is a comfort level and with the audience and the aesthetics of a newscast, aesthetics of presentation of course do matter and I do think those could have been massively improved (Kern, 2006).

One of the key goals of the program was to produce a non-formulaic newscast. Routine editorial decisions, often made with relative ease in many U.S. newsrooms, were debated from a clean slate and measured against a traditional, normative journalism

philosophy. That daily exercise, during the course of weeks and months, became mentally, emotionally and psychologically taxing. The cumulative effect, according to Kern, was a detriment:

There's a lot of unevenness, and I think one expects that day in and day out. Let's face it, it's much easier to produce a formula. You don't have to think about it, it's so easy. This program required enormous thought and shaping and creativity and everybody's not going to playing at the same game, same energy level every single day (Kern, 2006).

Additionally, Kern sensed that a program rich with journalistic substance might have had a cumulative effect on the audience, too:

I think there were times when it was just a little bit too preachy and a little bit too, perhaps it felt like a civics lesson to some folks. And maybe the stories were too long. These were all questions, these were all things that needed to be finessed. I think we were by and large pretty good at it (Kern, 2006).

Flannery seemed to agree with Kern's assessment, believing "there was an audience for this show, we didn't get enough time to let them find us." But he also appeared to be frustrated by the low level of acceptance for a show he personally liked:

I'm just telling you what I hear from people who watched, you know, my friends. I begged my friends to watch. And then they weren't watching. My relatives stopped watching [laughs] ... "It wasn't fun to watch." And it was, uh, you know, it was another way of saying what Hume and DeHaven were saying, that some of the shows were unwatchable. You

know, I never could quite – at the time that used to infuriate me. What does that mean? But it’s what these people were saying, you know. They weren’t watching (Flannery, 2006).

Parker also sensed a negative cumulative effect on the audience:

I might have lightened up some of the stories, give it a few more Grace Notes [regular community-centered news segment] rather than the hard, unrelenting march of these tough, the-world-is-bad sort of stories: local government stinks, they’re all crooks and we’re gonna show it to you again (Parker, 2006).

Many of the past several comments seem to have two common elements. One is that many of the participants don’t appear willing to concede the program was a poor example of a solid newscast. Parker and Flannery attributed their criticisms to third parties. Flannery still believes there was an audience for the program. And Kern remarked they “were by and large pretty good at” producing a good show. This attitude implies they were pleased with the journalistic content of the program. The second common element might be the key to revealing the true weakness of the program – an acknowledged lack of balance. That concept is addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Editorial Balance - Tradition and Competition

The implicit goal of the participants of this study was to prove it possible to produce a traditional, normative television newscast that was viable in a commercial market. They considered it a challenge. *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol*

Marin, to achieve those goals, would have to fulfill two basic goals – provide substantive content and attract a sufficient number of viewers to stay afloat. Data would indicate participants were satisfied that they achieved their editorial goals. They did not, by any measure including their own admission, achieve the second goal. As this initiative was a highlight of their professional careers, the participants had all thoroughly and thoughtfully visited and revisited the subject throughout the intervening years. The results of their analysis are reflected in the rich, detailed data they provided for this study.

The participants believed the market-driven model of local television news programs was losing credibility by sacrificing traditional substantive content. Parker used an analogy to illustrate the paradigm as he perceived it:

If I come to sell you some insurance, and I tap dance all over your living room, and do magic tricks and pull silks out of my pockets, you might be entertained, but are you gonna buy insurance from me? When you start thinking about what kinda guy does this in my living room? ... Even if they watch us, and we were putting crap on the air, all you're doing is putting crap on the air. You're not, you're not hooking up to the audience and you're not engendering their trust and their respect for you. That's what a news operation has to have (Parker, 2006).

Parker and his colleagues, therefore, believed it was essential to eliminate those metaphorical parlor tricks and tap dances. Parker believed in retrospect, however, the overall tone of the program sacrificed the balance viewers had come to expect for a heavy diet of substance:

I know there were some nights when I think the weather was considered collapsible, that if the weather wasn't particularly threatening and whatever, instead of doing two minutes on the weather, they'd kiss it off in twenty seconds. I think there's a certain number of viewers out there who would want and expect a personable weather guy, to kind of let you know what's gonna happen over the next four or five days, and be a human being about it. That may have been a mistake, too ... I think we collapsed sports, too, when – the thought was, well, there's not much going on in sports tonight, so let's just kind of kiss it off and get it done in forty-five seconds. Again, I don't think that was a good idea. That was probably a big mistake (Parker, 2006).

Editorial discussions, as described by Marin, appeared to take a micro perspective, measuring individual topics and stories against the program's normative philosophy:

There were long discussions about if there was a warehouse burning in the middle of downtown, no one is hurt. Do you lead with that because it's a great picture or do you reference it maybe because it was creating traffic jams, but you don't make as big a deal of it? Do we do some of the conventional things that we have always done or do we try to do them differently? ... Do we reduce the obligatory sports hole? Do we reduce the obligatory weather hole? Do we expand some other parts? You do some culture, or maybe you do some science. Maybe you do a longer take out

on a political piece. There were plenty of those kinds of questions (Marin, 2006).

Other editorial decisions were made for the sake of efficiency. For example, the valuable time saved by eliminating teases – previews of stories yet to be reported – would provide more time for longer, more substantive stories. Marin applied the same reasoning for including only one news anchor with the sports and weather anchors:

In some ways, you got down to business faster because you chatted less.

Because if you have four people across the desk or two people across the desk, you can suck up an awful lot of time going back to Ron, back to you Carol, back to you, you know, Tim. It wasn't – you know I'd done some solo anchoring before if only because someone was missing in action – it wasn't such a radical change to my mind (Marin, 2006).

Participants had very different perspectives regarding another type of editorial balance – whether or not audiences were ready and willing to accept a heavy diet of substantial information in the late evening time slot. Parker, citing the success of *Nightline*, believed it was an excellent time for substantive news because people had relieved themselves of their own concerns by then. Flannery, conceding the network would not allow it, toyed with the idea of somehow expanding the length of the ten o'clock broadcast. Kern acknowledged putting such a show in the late night slot might have been a fatal flaw. “But looking back, what was it suitable for? Where would you put it? Certainly you're not going to give up access or prime. So ten o'clock was the only place it could go.” Callaway, however, had a very different idea about the late news that he related only partially tongue-in-cheek:

If Price had come to me instead of Carol Marin, I might have given him a ten o'clock news that was shorter, not longer ... You want a larger audience? I'll give you 31 stories in nine minutes. And then you can go to bed. I'll give you the 10:00 to 10:15 news. And it'll work. The goal is to enlarge your audience, impart some things ... And I might make the ten o'clock news a goddamn bulletin board if I had to do it commercially ...

By then, I think what many of us are looking for is Los Angeles still there? It didn't fall into the ocean. Was anybody bombed tonight? Uh, and you're looking for kind of an interesting cast of characters, Daddy, Mommy, the weather twins. You know, whatever it is, it's a cast of characters, not news. You want to know, though, is it gonna snow tomorrow, did the Bears win? ... I don't know we're sitting there at ten o'clock at night saying, "Boy, I hope they'll have a really good discussion of the liquidity that's created by the futures markets in Chicago. I mean, I'm an in-depth guy but I don't look to my ten o'clock news for depth and context and meaning (Callaway, 2006).

All study participants, in contemplating an ideal editorial balance for a traditional, normative news program, reconstructed specific examples from the Marin program. They pondered their examples as though they were magic keys that would open the treasure chest containing the ultimate answer. The reporters, Parker and Flannery, seemed to agonize about their examples. They seemed puzzled about a situation in which the "right" decisions yielded the "wrong" outcomes. In one example, Parker considered not only a "pure journalism" standard, but also considered another, less-ideological journalistic

tradition – competition. The example was from the February 7, 2000, broadcast – the very first program:

There was water main break somewhere in the city that day. And the other stations both led with it, and they did packages on it. Our broadcast that night relegated it to a twenty-second voice over, maybe at the end of the first section, maybe down in the second section, and there was a solid journalistic reason for doing that. It turns out it wasn't a system failure. People were not killed or injured. Few people were frankly even bothered by it. It was a rather spectacular picture of the water pouring out of this hole in the ground, but it had no significant effect in the long run on the city or the people that lived around it. And that's why the decision was made. That was pretty representative of the kinds of decisions that were made about the broadcast. It was, "Is this really crucial to the city? Or is it just a sideshow? Is it just something that we can kiss off? Or perhaps avoid doing altogether?" We gave it probably what it deserved. Lot of people came down on us for that. "Oh, Channel 7 and Channel 5, you know, they had a reporter out there live and blah, blah, blah." Was that not reflecting the city? I don't know. I think we reflected it. We showed the water mainly. We just didn't overplay it. Is that a mistake? I don't know (Parker, 2006).

Flannery, in relating his example, seemed more ready to expand his interpretation of editorial balance, but he appeared to do so reluctantly:

There was the famous night that it snowed, and it snowed, the story only [ran] 30 seconds. And Carol famously said, “It snowed today,” or “It’s snowing now ...” and then she moved on. One of my colleagues was suggesting, you know, that didn’t – in a sense that maybe they didn’t respect the audience enough in the shared experience nature of TV news. Snowstorms in Chicago are a shared experience ... There’s a feeling of fellowship, of ‘we’re all in this together,’ people help each other’s cars get out of the snow, you know, you want to see some acknowledgement of that. I’m not saying you had to go crazy on it, but 30 seconds wasn’t enough on a night that it snowed. I’d be aware of that shared experience thing ... It was, like, you know, there was something missing. A lot of people tuned in and they wanted to have their experience of the day validated. If I can translate what I was told by people, I think that was a big mistake (Flannery, 2006).

Callahan, during our interview, was consistent in detailing the necessary elements to attract an audience to a journalistically sound television news program. The same question was posed in different ways, and he used different language for each answer. The same three elements, however, were always at the heart of his answers. Those elements were good beat reporting, heavy promotion, and management patience – five years’ worth of patience. Callahan also made it clear that a television newscast is not a simple transaction between producer and viewer. Callahan seemed to describe a relationship that is complex and personal:

[Former CBS News president Van Gordon] Sauter used to say a very interesting thing when he was asked about the conflict between entertainment and news. And his answer was, “We do a thing called television.” And I really think that you have to have some performance capacity, you just do ... I think the hiring of Kurtis and Jacobson was exactly – not only do you get some measure of depth and a great measure of experience, but there was a storyline involving the two of them. It was big brother and little brother. You had to have a kind of the same thing with *60 Minutes*. That’s a cast of characters. And they go running off on their steeds to bring you the stories of triumph and deceit and mourning and celebration. All of that is television. It’s like it’s much closer to being in a church than a classroom. In a church, you must try to impart some truths, you must be able to affirm, you must be able to warn and caution, and you must be able to entertain, to bring this word of God in a way that thrills you. And news has some – some celebratory, cautionary, informative context to – and – and presentational context. It just does (Callaway, 2006).

If Callahan’s vision of news program as familiar relationship is accurate, then the key to understanding the fate of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* might reside in the philosophies of its conception. That is the topic of the final chapter of this study.

Chapter VI

Conclusions

MYTHOLOGY, MISSED OPPORTUNITY, AND A NEW MODEL

Some things work, some things don't. Some things happen, some things don't. But, you know, there is no lasting sadness or melancholy about this. We tried it, and I'm glad we tried it. I am sorry it didn't, you know, have a longer life or, in my judgment, a better chance.

Carol Marin - Journalist

All interviews for this study were conducted approximately six years after *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* aired. Although a considerable amount of time had passed, all participants were exceptionally thoughtful in their recollections. They relished the experience, cherished the good memories, and the bad ones still seemed as painful as when they originally occurred. It appeared as though the participants were still searching for clues that might reveal the “real” reasons why such a journalistically sound program failed to attract enough viewers to justify its existence. They continued to believe that a traditional, socially-responsible newscast could be commercially successful, conceding only that their attempt at such a newscast was not the one.

The concluding chapter of this study presents the researcher's findings related to the research question. The results of selective coding are also discussed and incorporated into a new mutual support model that illustrates a symbiotic relationship between station management and its news organization to the benefit of viewers. This final chapter

delineates the study's limitations and offers areas and ideas for continuing the research commenced in this study.

A Loss of Meaning

- R1 – What would happen if a television news organization changed its format to reflect a traditional, normative, socially-responsible editorial policy in direct competition with modern, commercial news programming?

In assessing the performance of any organization, it is essential to understand the roles of its key members. In a television station, the general manager is responsible for all aspects of the operation. The executive's primary responsibility is to turn a profit. The heads of all departments and divisions, including the news director, report to the general manager. The two primary responsibilities of news directors are the quality and integrity of the editorial product, and operating within the fiscal limitations imposed on them by corporate ownership and by their general managers. Middle managers – assistant news directors, assignments editors, executive producers and newscast producers – also have dual responsibilities with differing goals. The first responsibility is to produce programs audiences will watch. The second is a hands-on editorial function that ensures journalistic integrity. Reporters complete the editorial chain of command. They are concerned chiefly with their own individual stories and assignments that air within newscasts. Their responsibility is to produce journalistically sound, aesthetically pleasing reports.

In the case of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*, the closest datum to a stated goal is the comment (page 78) by general manager Hank Price to news director Pat Costello:

“What if every day we had a group of really strong journalists who had been there a long time ... what if we put those people in a room every day and instead of having a regular meeting we talked and argued over what was a really important story and whatever was important go and cover that like crazy?” (Price, 2006).

The implied goal, however, was to improve ratings as evidenced by their expectation of imminent dismissal from their positions. The data would indicate the news staff lost sight of this – instead placing exceptional emphasis on producing traditional, normative journalism and far less emphasis on attracting an audience. Recasting this result in the context of Weick’s properties for sensemaking, the result of this experiment was a disruption of sensemaking due to a loss of meaning. The organization replaced the method for achieving the goal – normative journalism – for the actual goal itself.

A contributing factor to this loss of meaning was the predominant mythology of the news organization. That mythology was the belief, in a certain “if we build it they will come” expectation, that normative journalism will attract audience of sufficient size given enough time and exposure. This conclusion is supported in the data in which participants reflected a strong belief that the audience never “found” the Marin show, and that success was hampered by a lack of promotion. This mythology was reinforced by the prevailing legend of the organization’s Kurtis-Jacobson era. Participants noted that it took five years for the organization, led by the Kurtis-Jacobson anchor team, to achieve ratings

success. The legend was the assumption that the only factor in that success was the practice of normative journalism. The legend was created by a memory distorted by time as explained previously by the concept of introspection. It was this concept that helped create the mythology and the subsequent unrealistic expectation of improved ratings. A model more appropriate for the experiment would have been *60 Minutes*, the broadcast that pioneered the melding of normative journalism with softer news. One irony is that Marin, herself, reported for the program's spin-off, *60 Minutes II*.

The organizational mythology was actually reinforced by an initial increase in audience. The increase, however, was short lived and the audience decreased dramatically. The disruption of sensemaking negated the sources of resilience that Weick claims is essential for successful organizations. Those sources of resilience are identified in Weick's Mann Gulch study (1993) and include improvisation, the attitude of wisdom, and norms of respectful interaction. The organization's inability to be resilient, even in the face of perceived management opposition, predetermined the experiment's failure.

Improvisation

The resilience to improvise on the original editorial philosophy could have been one avenue toward success. Indeed, simply engaging one stated goal of editorial balance would have been a positive contributor. Marin, respecting varied audience tastes, acknowledged editorial balance was a newscast composed of material she was at least "51 percent proud of." Kern described a balanced newscast as similar to a symphony with pacing and rhythm and counter-point. Yet, in the editorial process, the merit of individual stories was measured against traditional, normative journalistic standards in the

Jeffersonian tradition of providing information for informed self-governance. Participants seemingly did not recognize these individual stories as being smaller elements of a larger unit – the newscast as a whole. Thus, an individual newscast could be compared to a fine steak dinner that was composed of a succulent and juicy 24-ounce Porterhouse, a forkful of baked potato, three green beans and, for dessert, not cheesecake but a half-tablespoon of apple pie. If the organization possessed the ability to improvise, the editorial staff could have reassessed aspects of their program that are important to audiences – characteristics such as aesthetics, presentation, personality, and story comprehension – without sacrificing qualities of solid journalism.

The staff implemented one improvisational device toward that goal – expanding the editorial meeting to include input from the reporters. Such inclusion has the potential to broaden the perspective of reporters. The data suggest, however, the meetings lacked editorial diversity with no contrary voice in the editorial meetings.

Wisdom

In addition to improvisation, another source of resiliency is wisdom. The engagement of this quality might have helped mitigate one attitude some journalists express toward ratings. Television journalists often see ratings as a gauge of affirmation for the quality their work – they would interpret higher ratings an indication of a job well done while lower ratings would indicate substandard performance. In reality, ratings are traditionally poor gauges of journalistic accomplishment. In short, it is not wise because it is not accurate. Other standards, such as peer review and industry awards, are a much more accurate measure of good journalism. The data would tend to indicate the

participants avoided equating quality journalism with ratings. The reviews were generally much more complimentary than the ratings. Marin, in fact, won an Emmy for excellence as an anchor two days before the program's last broadcast on October 30, 2000.

The newswriters might have been better served, however, by recognizing audience size for what it actually represents – station revenue. Most journalists pay at least minimal attention to ratings. Flannery and Parker, despite assertions to the contrary, most assuredly were aware that *The Ten O'Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was ranked lower than their competitors' news programs. When journalists consider ratings, they often do so to gauge the competitive balance of their market – they want to know the “score.” Higher ratings might mean a “win” for competitive journalists, but they also mean increased revenue and a greater chance of a program staying on the air. Journalists who normally pay attention to ratings for competitive reasons would have another reason for checking the competition – an economic reason. Recognition would reflect the true reality of the relationship between ratings and profitability.

The inability to enact the resilient principle of wisdom could also explain the organization's failure to reassess two other possible deficiencies – formula and aesthetics. Managers made a conscious decision to utilize a presentation much less flashy than prevalent at the time. The reason justification was to reflect to the viewer a greater emphasis on journalistic content. However, elements such as a studio set and graphics are not just functional but also serve as symbols. A sudden de-emphasis of aesthetic elements, however, might have sent another signal to viewers. The audience might have interpreted the scaled-down studio set and simplified graphics as reflective of the entire organization, including to editorial content. If there appears to be little investment in the

set and graphics, viewers might see the entire news operation as second rate. Managers also made a conscious decision to abandon any type of formula in the production of the daily newscast. The reasoning was to allow the content to dictate the form. This compelled the organization to create each evening's broadcast anew, an effort Kern admitted was exhausting. One could call it a daily exercise in recreating the wheel. Elements such as aesthetics and format are often topics well-researched and addressed by broadcast news consultants. In the decision to avoid any element that was "consultant-driven," the organization might have rejected consideration of an available body of wisdom from which managers could have found some benefit.

Respectful Interaction with Management

There are two reasons media companies produce television journalism. One is to serve the public interest for reasons documented in this study. The other is to earn profits. As such, a television news organization must attend to two separate constituencies – station management and the audience. There is evidence in the data to support the conclusion that the organization lacked respect for both.

Disregarding management concern for the fiscal realities of the industry has an historical background for journalists. Federal regulators, during the first decades of the existence of broadcasting, required public service as a condition for holding a license. That public service requirement was usually fulfilled by providing news coverage. Because doing news was mandatory, journalists tended to see themselves as exempt from fiscal responsibility. In the most direct sense, that attitude was accurate. Their activities were funded by profits from entertainment programming. That sense of journalist

exemption sometimes reflected a sense of entitlement. Edward R. Murrow, for example, suggested in his landmark 1958 speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association (the “wires in a box” speech) that successful U.S. corporations should subsidize substantive prime time documentaries. Journalists saw their motivations as pure because they were working on behalf of the public good. Conversely, the journalists’ attitude toward those responsible for revenue trended toward the negative in part because the managers’ motivation was seen as mercenary. It is arguable that these attitudes have persisted, possibly even worsened, as the industry has shifted from the trusteeship model to the market-driven model.

The data generated for this study reveal a significant pattern in attitude toward management based on the role of each individual employee. Reporters, for instance, reflected a clear and definite attitude of antagonism toward corporate and station managers who are responsible for revenue, and toward news managers whom they perceive make editorial decisions for reasons other than solid journalism. Those study participants who are or could be classified as middle news managers exhibited little to moderate antagonism. One participant with a background in news management exhibited little or no antagonism.

Both reporters, Mike Parker and Mike Flannery, exhibited antagonism toward management during their interviews. Parker’s was more intense in his rhetoric toward the managers themselves – at one point calling them “the haircuts that run the place” – and the strategies they develop to attract audiences. Data presented in the previous chapter reflected Parker’s attitude that he doesn’t “wanna be a friend” to any general manager because he has seen too many people “knifed in the back.” His antagonism toward

production techniques and devices instituted by market-driven managers – “flaming idiots” – elicited equal ire as he derided “walking and talking” (meaningless on-camera movement and gestures by a reporter) and putting “crap” on the air. Parker seemed especially antagonistic toward flashy, multiple graphics packages in the screen. “That’s where I think television news has really gone nuts,” Parker said. “If you’ve got good pictures, let’s see the pictures. Let’s not have crap crawling across the bottom and crap over on the side.” Conversely, Parker praised news managers such as Costello and Kern whom he identified as kindred spirits because of their support for quality journalism. Flannery was equally supportive of Costello, Kern, and other managers he identified as being pro-normative journalism. He tried to be diplomatic in expressing his antagonism toward other managers. He said of one executive, “Yeah, uhm, smartest man in the world, just ask him.” He was also somewhat disparaging of general manager Walt DeHaven and news director Craig Hume, the managers who are identified with canceling the Marin show, claiming, “They had a bunch of alibis for how, how it went down.”

Kern and Marin straddled the philosophical line between manager and journalist, although Marin was technically not a manager on the show. Marin did not disparage managers as a group but targeted her antagonism toward specific managers and executives. Her attitude toward Joel Cheatwood is documented in this study. She also framed cutbacks ordered by CBS headquarters as originating from corporate parent Viacom, which she termed as “Mel Karmazin world” after the Viacom president. Kern railed against a perceived lack of management support, but expressed only mild, veiled objection to the profit motivation. She expressed no direct antagonism toward any class of manager. Her antagonism, as Marin’s, was targeted. She singled out the corporate

executives whom she believed responsible for canceling the Marin program. “The people had already become impatient in New York,” Kern related. “Mel, Mel Karmazin and his boys, and Joel Cheatwood. This (the Marin program) was not their idea, this was not their decision.” In short, Kern and Marin’s attitudes toward management were less antagonistic than those of Parker and Flannery.

Callaway, himself a former news executive, exhibited little antagonism for managers responsible for profits. He instead offered a formula for producing a journalistically sound program that could also be commercially successful. His vague criticisms were limited to management impatience, especially their impatience with the Marin initiative. “This should be a five-year program,” Callaway insisted. “But we don’t do five-year programs.”

Respect for Viewers

There is also evidence in the data that indicates a lack of respect for the audience, its preferences and its needs. When producing television news in a commercial environment in which ratings dictate survival, it is important to consider why people choose to watch news on television. The basic motivation, of course, is to be informed. But viewers also seek validation, reassurance and shared experience (Levy, 1978) – motivations acknowledged in the data. Elements such as weather and sports segments, pageants and ethnic festivals combine with solid journalistic content to help satisfy those viewer motivations. A winter snowstorm in Chicago is not unexpected and therefore may not meet a normative definition of news. The occurrence, however is not merely a possible news story for the organization to report or ignore, it is an opportunity to

cultivate a relationship with the audience by ratifying that shared experience of hardship. Such an editorial philosophy respects the relationship with viewers as not a mere transfer of information from a sender to a receiver, but a social process as well.

In such a dynamic, viewers tend to create pseudo-relationships with news personalities (Levy, 1978; Rubin *et al*, 1985). Many broadcast journalists, for example, have experienced viewers initiating conversations with them in public places as though they were previously acquainted. That reflects a measure of comfort or familiarity with the journalist. A news program that utilizes a single anchor format for the purpose of time efficiency might be counterproductive to nurturing that sense of relationship with viewers. Utilizing at least minimal crosstalk between anchors would tend to respect that familiarity with the viewer without a great sacrifice of time.

A Missed Opportunity

Participants in this study acknowledged the change in format that created *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* was an opportunity of a lifetime. Its failure made it a missed opportunity. Its failure might provide keys to managing change in a broadcast news organization. Interpretation of the data reveals both philosophical and tangible elements. The philosophical elements entail relationships with a news organization’s two predominant constituencies – management and the audience.

A news organization’s relationship with its audience is exercised chiefly through its broadcasts. Journalistic content is the major element in this relationship, but it is only one factor in the success of the relationship. The data would suggest balance, stability and incremental change are also substantial factors in determining success. The participants

agreed much of the content of the program was excellent “hard” journalism of which they were very proud. They also acknowledged there was a disproportionate amount of hard news in most individual programs. The observation that the broadcast became “unwatchable” was likely because the program was overpowered by the tone of its content. Any change, therefore, should have been accompanied to a greater attention to balance – a goal participants agreed was desirable.

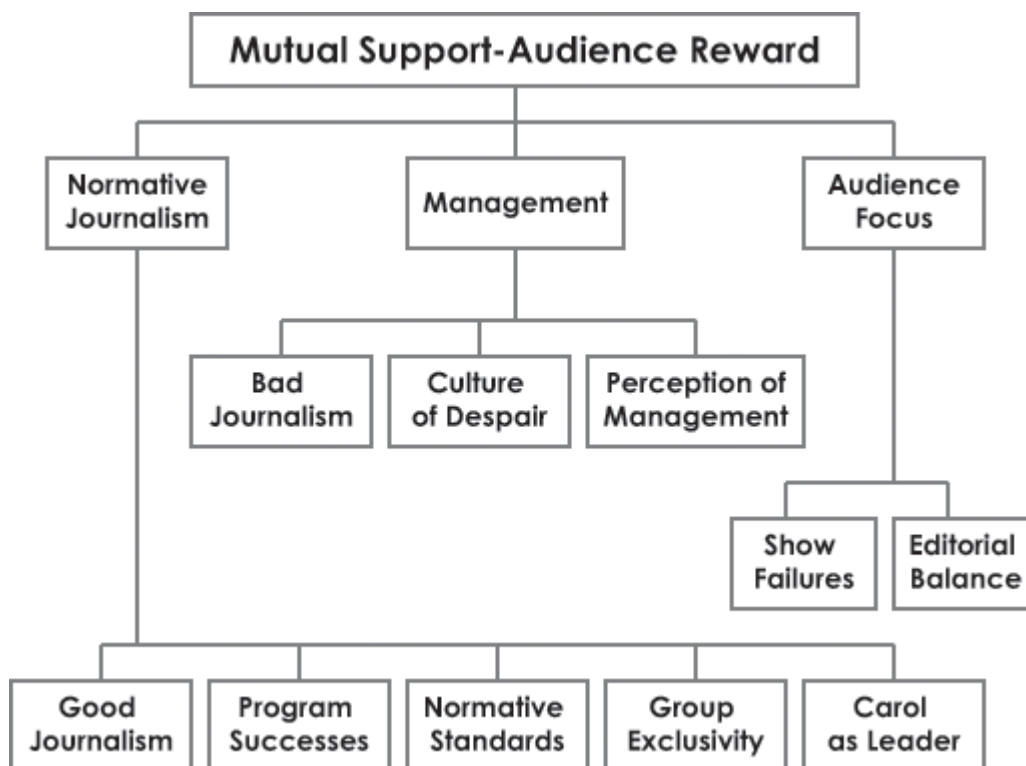
As change tends to threaten a relationship (Weick, 1995), stability would tend to enhance a television news organization’s relationship with its audience. Major changes, such as a change of anchor, for example, or change in format, are inherently risky. The greatest risk is losing viewers who are uncomfortable with the changes while concurrently failing to attract new viewers. Any strategy to increase ratings, therefore, should include a commitment to stability – developing a format and sticking with it. Any changes in aesthetics, personnel or any other element easily perceived by the audience should therefore be incremental to minimize audience sampling – a search for a more comfortable relationship. Substantive journalism in the form of superior storytelling, some in-depth reporting, occasional live interviews and on-set reporter debriefings – elements of the Marin program – could then be produced within that format.

The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin was not the last high-profile news program to lose ratings following a major change. When the *CBS Evening News* replaced Bob Schieffer with Katie Couric, the program changes in some ways paralleled the Marin experience. In addition to a different news anchor, the entire format and overall appearance underwent a highly-publicized overhaul. The change in ratings also followed the same pattern as the Marin ratings – an initial increase followed by a rapid decline and

then stagnation. Conversely, a positive model can be found in a previous *CBS Evening News* change. When the program replaced the retiring Dan Rather with Schieffer, changes were incremental. Schieffer's personality was seen as more easygoing than the somewhat stiff Rather. Schieffer's incorporation of reporter crosstalk with correspondents was also perceived as being much more relaxed than Rather's. Ratings increased.

Such an example illustrates a news organization's relationship with its audience. How an organization might manage change with its other constituency, management, is reflected by the model developed as a result of this study.

Figure 1 - Selective Coding



The Mutual Support-Audience Reward Model

The final step in the process of analysis is selective coding. This study has previously detailed the process of open coding that resulted in ten emic categories. Those emic categories were grouped around three axes that also represent the three major elements in the journalism process – the business entity, the news organization and the audience. Those elements were coded as “Management,” “Normative Journalism” and “Audience Focus.” Through the process of selective coding, these three interrelated concepts can be expressed through a new model that emerged from these elements. That model is termed the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model. (*See Figure 1*)

The data are open to multiple interpretations. It is possible, for instance, to conclude that bad journalism is not a measure of lack of management support but is instead a failure on the part of the journalist to perform adequately within a new and commercially accepted paradigm. The concept of group exclusivity could be interpreted as counterproductive to normative journalism because of the schisms it might create. As constituted, however, the emic and etic data reveal a representation that accurately depicts the processes and relationships that composed successes and failures of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin*.

The Mutual Support-Audience Reward model illustrates the process by which it is possible to produce a traditional, normative news product in a contemporary, commercial environment. (*See Figure 2*) It is a new model of mutual support between management and editorial employees that provides a balanced normative news product to the audience, and rewards the organization with news consumers and the resulting profits. The news organization in this model, responding to current industry demands, would be a

converged operation producing regularly-scheduled television news programs while continually updating an online resource with photo, text and video content that users could access on demand. Within this model, management would provide sufficient support for the editorial personnel to properly do their jobs. This is illustrated in the model by the arrow connecting “Management Patience and Support” to “Journalist Recognition of Economic Realities.” Managers would also provide patience for a program to cultivate television and online audiences large enough to generate profits from advertising revenue on both platforms. One key would be enhancing stability by resisting any radical change in the television program’s format that might trigger a negative audience sampling.

Figure 2 - The Mutual Support-Audience Reward Model



Following the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model, the news staff would be responsible for recognizing the need for management to make a profit. This is illustrated in the model by the arrow feeding back from “Journalist Recognition of Economic Realities” to “Management Patience and Support.” As staff members perform their jobs with their usual awareness of ratings, they would consciously make the connection between ratings and revenue so as to avoid an attitude of “journalism entitlement” and conclude that high-level performance increases their chances of continued employment in a shrinking market. This attitude might also cultivate a sense of shared purpose and mitigate antagonism toward management. Journalists’ attitudes, it should be noted, would be largely dependent on management meeting its responsibilities.

With these relationships in place, newswriters would have a paradigm conducive to creating a journalistically sound, commercially viable news program and a vital online news presence, represented in the model by the element of “Balanced, Normative News Product.” Such a situation would allow a news organization to produce a balanced, personable television newscast that would fit the definition of traditional, normative journalism while meeting other traditional audience viewing motives such as validation, reassurance and shared experience. The news department would, of course, make small, incremental changes as needed in response to audience reaction – ratings – to ensure it is meeting audience needs. This reaction is illustrated in the model by the arrow pointing from “Audience Acceptance” to “Balanced Normative News Product.” The content of the news broadcasts would also be made available online for users who prefer to choose which stories they want to view and when they want to view them. The online presence, for at least the short-term future, would be considered an adjunct to the actual, live

television news programs. The justification for this approach is found in current research that indicates news consumers, given the option of receiving the same news whenever they wanted, would select television news by a margin of more than three-to-one compared to newspapers and nearly six-to-one compared to the online platform (Papper, 2007). Coupled with management contributions of patience and support, including sufficient promotion, the news organization would be able, over time, to attract a substantial audience, represented in the model as “Audience Acceptance.” As the audience grows, the resulting advertising profits would justify continued management patience and support. This justification is illustrated in the model by the arrow feeding back to “Management Patience and Support” from “Audience Acceptance.” In short, the model, when functioning properly, would be self-sustaining.

If for no other reason, journalist self-interest should be a sufficient motivation to consider seriously the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model by supporting management’s responsibility to profitability. That incentive is the current economic condition of the electronic journalism industry. The combination of corporate consolidation and editorial synergy has led to a well-documented job contraction. Since the beginning of 2007, Media General and Young broadcasting each cut their workforces by eleven percent, Barrington Broadcasting cut back by eight percent and, in late March 2008, CBS laid off 120 employees from its owned-and-operated stations. During the latter half of June 2008 alone, corporate owners laid off scores of editorial employees across the country. In addition to the previously mentioned Newport Television employees – about 160 – those job cuts included:

- Eight newsroom employees at KNTV, the NBC owned and operated station in the San Francisco Bay area
- Eight newsroom employees at KTLA, the CW affiliate in Los Angeles
- Six staff members at WOIO/WUAB, the Raycom duopoly in Cleveland
- Ten employees at WRCB, the NBC affiliate in Chattanooga
- Twelve staffers of ABC's *Nightline* program
- Ten employees at WFLA, the NBC affiliate in Tampa (Malone, 2008)

Additionally, at least two veteran, high profile, on-air personalities were laid off for economic reasons and will not be replaced – anchor Marla Weech of WKMG-TV in Orlando and sportscaster Marc Soicher of KWGN in Denver. Declining profits are threatening journalist employment – a direct and immediate incentive for cooperating in management's fiscal responsibility.

Limitations and Further Research

This research is the first academic study of the phenomenon once called the “best hope for a return to real news” (Hickey, 2001). *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* is an important benchmark in the continuing evolution of electronic journalism. Although it was not commercially successful, it served to publicly highlight – “shine a light,” if you will – on the trend toward softer, less socially-responsible content of television news. It also represented the continued effort among normative electronic journalists to enhance the integrity of the genre. This work, however, should ideally be the first step in a more complete case history of the program.

The limitations of this particular effort, coupled with the grounded theoretical nature of its construction, redirected the study toward findings that reflect more universal journalistic concepts. While these findings open significant new streams of research, the history and intricacies of *The Ten O’Clock News: Reported by Carol Marin* remain largely unexplored. Of particular interest is the dynamic between corporate management, station management and newsroom management, especially in the areas of philosophy and funding. Any future study should also address three issues of participant access. The first is corporate-level managers who were located and contacted but declined participation, either overtly or through avoidance. The second issue involves the participants in the Marin program who are still employees of WBBM-TV and were reluctant to speak with this researcher. Although the reasons are likely varied, it is highly probable, considering the current environment of both the newsroom and the industry, that job security, as speculated here by Marin herself, was a major factor. A third group of individuals was simply too busy to make time for a long interview. Considering these issues, it would be advantageous for any future investigator to have exceptional contacts among the participants of the program, and to have the luxury of time. It is additionally suggested that participant confidentiality be employed if and where feasible, such as among larger employee groups as reporters and photographers, and among station and corporate employees not directly associated with the program.

The concept of antagonism toward management along the editorial hierarchy emerged from the data and, to this researcher, is especially intriguing. The limitations of the study – an exceptionally small homogeneous group of participants – make it impossible to generalize the phenomenon at any level. There is a large subset of variables

that could and should be considered in any subsequent investigation. These variables would include but not be limited to age and gender of the participants, length of work experience in journalism, news philosophy, market size, job title and history of career advancement. Valuable data could be generated by both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation. Further study is justified by the relative importance of journalist attitude in the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model.

Yet another possible stream emanating from the concept of antagonism involves documenting the thoughts and attitudes of veteran journalists. Of specific interest is whether or not antagonism a factor in causing veteran journalists to leave the electronic news business either voluntarily or through layoff. As previously noted, veteran journalists often act as mentors for newer employees. Attrition for any reason deprives the industry of their valuable mentoring activities.

The continuing integration of new media would add an important aspect to such research. As journalists are increasingly required to provide material across media platforms – video reports, audio reports, text reports and even photos – it would be valuable to assess attitudes toward management in general and the level of any antagonism in specific. Such results could be compared to journalists with fewer or no cross-platform responsibilities.

The professional experience of newer, younger journalists has been limited to the market-driven model. This could be fertile ground for researching their understanding of and level of support for traditional, normative journalism. It would be valuable to understand how their perspective compares that that of more experienced, veteran

journalists and how well those attitudes match the Jeffersonian goals of traditional, normative journalism.

Finally, there are the research opportunities created by the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model itself. Any such test of the model would involve a major, long-term commitment with at least one cooperating television station. All aspects of the systems as described in the model would be studied – attitudes and performance of management; attitudes, editorial policy and editorial performance within the news organization; long term tracking of ratings; supplementary audience data and an assessment of market and industry variables. Such a long-term study would have the additional benefit of testing the Mutual Support-Audience Reward model on changes the television news organizations would make in their operations as they increasingly incorporate Internet technology into their delivery systems. Such a study would likely require a team of researchers working over a long period of time. Definitive results could be pending over the course of several years. Results, however, could provide exceptional insight into the elements affecting the commercial success of traditional, normative television journalism.

The greatest limitation to any such model is the future of journalism itself. The Mutual Support-Audience Reward model presupposes change along a current evolutionary path. Certain conditions are assumed. First and foremost – journalism will survive. The evolutionary path also assumes electronic journalism will continue to be advertiser supported. Advertisers need access to markets. Commercially successful news organizations can deliver those markets across various platforms. Additionally, public response to direct pay premium news services on the Internet sites such as the *New York*

Times would tend to indicate subscribers alone could not financially sustain a major news organization. These assumptions are reasonable based on these trends and current audience preferences as documented by Papper (2007). The Mutual Support-Audience Reward model is designed to accommodate such anticipated changes and, with modifications, would likely survive certain unanticipated changes.

Assumptions, however, are just that. The market will ultimately decide what form the dominant media will take. As television once supplanted radio as the dominant form of mass communication, television and Internet communication might also be relegated to niche status by “the next big thing.” At this point in history, there is only speculation as to what this might be. Traditional broadcast networks, for instance, might cease regular broadcast schedules and become content providers for on-demand services. In another scenario, televisions, radios, computers and digital media players might be consolidated with telephones as personal, portable, all-in-one satellite media devices. All theoretical models in such a radically different media environment would need to be reformulated.

The only assumption that appears certain, therefore, is the viability of journalism itself. The public will always need and want information about its society. As Papper notes, the biggest threat to traditional media is an outdated business model. One new business model for the print media has already been proposed. Journalist and scholar Philip Meyer has proposed what he calls the “influence model.” The basis of Meyer’s model is his contention that a newspaper’s main product is not news and information but influence – societal influence and commercial influence. Such a model might contain at least loose parallels to broadcasting’s two models – the trusteeship model and the market-

driven model. When social responsibility and economic realities are both served, normative journalism can survive in the commercial marketplace.

Appendix A

PETER A. CASELLA

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E-mail: casella@unc.edu

October 30, 2006

Mr. Mike Flannery
WBBM CBS 2 Chicago
630 North McClurg Court
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Mr. Flannery:

I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. For my dissertation, I am doing a case study of a past WBBM-TV newscast on which you worked, *The Ten O'Clock News with Carol Marin*. Although the newscast has been dissected by the trade press and editorialists, it has never been studied objectively, dispassionately, or academically. That is my goal. And I could use your help.

To do an academically valid case study, I will need to meet and interview as many as ten to 12 people. I would like to include you in that group, based on your contribution to the program and the recommendation of others I have already interviewed.

Academic interviews are far different from news interviews. They involve in-depth discussions and possible short follow-up conversations. As the final document is actually supposed to present the case of the participants, you would have the final say on the content, tone and intent of your statements. In other words, it is my job to present your point of view. My role is to impartially analyze all the interviews and other information.

I will be in Chicago November 11-15 for the specific purpose of doing research for my study, and would like to schedule an appointment with you. I will contact you shortly to discuss my project and answer any questions you might have.

Respectfully,

Peter Casella
Roy H. Park PhD Fellow
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Appendix B

Reporter Questions

Tell me about your career.

What were you doing when the station started planning the Marin show?

What did you think when you heard about it?

How did it affect the way you did your job?

How was it a different experience for you?

How did the editorial process work?

Was it a change?

Who drove the boat?

What was your mindset concerning the show at the time?

What's your idea of what a good newscast should be?

How did the Marin show compare to that?

What was the role of management?

Did they seem to support it?

What made you think that?

What did you like about working on the show?

What didn't you like?

What was the mood of the staff?

Did everyone buy into the new philosophy?

There had been a lot of changes before this; what affect did that have?

What did you think of the product?

Why do you think it lasted just eight months?

What would you have done differently?

Did the assignments process change?

Was there a specific attempt to do certain types of stories?

What was Carol's rule?

Was she utilized properly?

How would you describe the staff's attitude toward her?

What would it take for a show like this to be successful?

Appendix C

Consent Forms

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Electronically Record an Interview in a Research Study
Adult Participants
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # 06-0726
Consent Form Version Date: Version 5-Oct-2006

Title of Study: The Chicago Experiment – What Went Wrong?

Principal Investigator: Peter A. Casella
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: JOMC
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: (919) 945-5694
Email Address: casella@unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. C.A. Tuggle

Study Contact telephone number: (919) 945-5694
Study Contact email: casella@unc.edu

I understand and agree that, as a part of my participation in this study, all interviews will recorded electronically to ensure accuracy. I also understand that I may, at any time during the interview, ask that the recording be stopped.

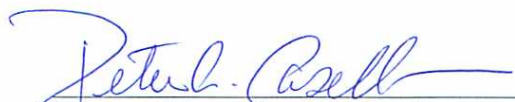
Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

X 
Signature of Research Participant

8/18/08
Date

John D. Callaway
Printed Name of Research Participant


Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/1/08
Date

Peter A. Casella
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

X Michael J. Flannery
Signature of Research Participant

22 Aug 2008
Date

Michael J. Flannery
Printed Name of Research Participant

Peter A. Casella
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/1/08
Date

Peter A. Casella
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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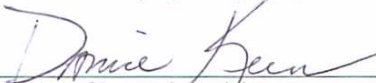
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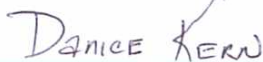
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X 


Signature of Research Participant

8-11-08

Date



Printed Name of Research Participant



Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/11/08

Date



Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

X Carol Marin
Signature of Research Participant

12 Aug 08
Date

CAROL MARIN
Printed Name of Research Participant

Peter A. Casella
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/1/08
Date

Peter A. Casella
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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X Mike Parker

Signature of Research Participant

8/18/08
Date

MIKE PARKER
Printed Name of Research Participant

Peter A. Casella
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/1/08
Date

Peter A. Casella
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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X 

Signature of Research Participant

8/4/08

Date

HENRY E PRICE

Printed Name of Research Participant



Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

8/1/08

Date

Peter A. Casella

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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