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NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP AND
THE WEEKLY EDITORIAL IN ILLINOIS

BY

MARK LEE GOODMAN

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree Master of Science
Major in Journalism and Mass Communication

South Dakota State University

1982

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP AND
THE WEEKLY EDITORIAL IN ILLINOIS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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CERTIFICATION OF COMPLETION
Oral Examination and
Thesis

This is to certify that Mark Lee Goodman in
accordance with the requirements of South Dakota State University for the degree
Master of Science has presented to this committee
two unbound copies of an acceptable thesis done in the major field; and has
satisfactorily passed the oral examination, the major field, Journalism
and the Supporting field Economics & History.

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MLG

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The independently owned newspaper is fast disappearing in the United States. Much like other American businesses, American newspapers have become an industry dominated by huge corporations.

Ownership of newspapers in the United States is becoming more concentrated because of newspaper groups, also known as newspaper chains.

A group can be defined as ownership and publication of several different newspapers in more than one location. During the twentieth century, groups have become the dominant form of ownership in the American newspaper industry. They control almost three-fourths of total daily newspaper circulation in the United States.¹ And groups are estimated to own as much as one-third of all weekly newspapers published in the nation.²

Because the phenomenon of group ownership could have implications on freedom of the press in the United States, this study examines editorials published by weekly newspapers and how these editorials are affected by the nature of newspaper ownership. The study compares editorials printed in independent and group owned weeklies.

Newspaper observers are concerned about the growth of newspaper groups. Observers are especially concerned about the potential threat groups pose to the editorial freedom and local autonomy of the newspapers the groups have acquired. Some critics, including Ben H. Bagdikian, United States Senator Larry Pressler of South

Dakota, Congressman Morris Udall of Arizona and the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, believe freedom of the press is endangered when newspaper ownership is concentrated among fewer owners.

The effect of ownership on the editorial content of weekly newspapers also deserves study for historical reasons. Newspapers are the only business mentioned in the Bill of Rights. Presstime, the journal of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, said newspapers were mentioned because of the important role they play in providing "crucial information needed by a free society to make effective decisions."³ Economics Professor Bruce M. Owens said he believes newspapers are America's "most important media link" with the framers of the Constitution.⁴

Weeklies are an important medium in American journalism. There are nearly 9,000 weekly newspapers published in the United States.⁵ These weeklies are sometimes looked upon as the "bedrock" of American journalism.⁶ The combined press run of all American weeklies is estimated at 38 million copies.⁷ And weekly newspapers are sources of information for an estimated 150 million readers in the United States.⁸

As far as the author could determine, no study on the effect of ownership on the editorial freedom and local autonomy of weekly newspapers had ever been attempted. Therefore, this study attempts to determine what effects ownership has on the editorial freedom and local autonomy of weekly newspapers.

Studies have been done concerning the effect of ownership on the editorial independence and local autonomy of daily newspapers.

For example, a 1976 study of West Coast dailies by Oregon graduate student Ralph R. Thrift Jr. found that group owned newspapers published fewer argumentative editorials in controversial contexts on local topics. Thrift said the editorials of independently owned newspapers declined in "vigor" after the newspapers were purchased by groups. However, the decline was not statistically significant.⁹

A 1956 study by Gerard H. Borstel of 20 dailies published in cities of below 25,000 in population indicated that non-competing, independently owned newspapers showed the strongest orientation to their home communities except in comment on economic subjects. The study said comment upon economic subjects, "such as the stimulation of new business and the continued prosperity of existing ones," showed itself more markedly in group owned newspapers.¹⁰

This study is timely because newspaper observers expect most of the 700 independent dailies will be purchased by groups before the end of the century.¹¹ Therefore, newspaper groups, whether large and urban or small and rural, are increasingly turning toward acquisition of weekly newspapers.

It is now commonplace for an American group to own both daily and weekly newspapers. Some of the largest daily groups also own weeklies. Gannett, the largest newspaper group in terms of number of dailies published (88), owns 26 weekly, semi-weekly or monthly publications in California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.¹² News America Publishing Inc., owned by Australian press magnate K. Rupert Murdoch, publishes a group of suburban weeklies in Texas. Time

magazine owns a Chicago-based weekly group. Other daily groups with large holdings of weeklies are Landmark Communications, Donrey, Harte-Hanks, Scripps-Howard, the New York Times Co., the Des Moines Register & Tribune Co., the Minneapolis Star & Tribune Co., Cox Enterprises, Ottaway Newspapers (Dow Jones Co.) and Thomson Newspapers.¹³

A 1979 report in Editor & Publisher said publishers of daily newspapers acquired "a large number" of the 175 weekly newspapers and shoppers sold in 1978.¹⁴ Publishers of daily newspapers figured in 40 percent of the 193 weeklies and shoppers sold in 1979, according to the magazine.¹⁵ Editor & Publisher reported that 68 of the 130 weeklies and shoppers sold in 1980 plus 100 of 136 sold in 1981 became affiliated with groups.¹⁶

Weeklies became more attractive to newspaper groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of profit potential. The Wall Street Journal said groups are "devouring" two types of weeklies: either "smaller ones unable to get by, or prosperous ones with healthy advertising bases."¹⁷ And weeklies, particularly suburban weeklies, are gaining readership while declining readership has contributed to the closings of the Washington Star, the Chicago Daily News, the Philadelphia Bulletin, the Minneapolis Star and other metropolitan dailies.

Advanced newspaper technology plus the practice of management by objective also have improved the profit potential of weekly newspapers. Smaller newspapers have adapted cost-saving technologies "not readily available to larger dailies."¹⁸

Acquisition of weeklies also has become more common among

groups because of tax regulations that encourage reinvestment of profit. Sometimes acquisition of weeklies is the only expansion possible for a newspaper group. Other group owned weeklies are published by rural and suburban all-weekly groups.

Journalism Professor Ronald G. Hicks, a former weekly publisher, said the all-weekly group has several characteristics. He said newspapers owned by such groups typically are clustered near a central printing plant. Daily groups, Hicks said, often have newspapers scattered in a wide geographic area. And some daily groups are publicly owned. He said weekly newspaper groups are privately held corporations.¹⁹

Hicks said all-weekly groups developed because of the need for central printing plants to generate a steady flow of work; the economies of scale, which includes the technologies of production and distribution; and the advantage such groups have in covering natural market areas.²⁰ That marketing advantage is closely related to the cluster arrangement of the all-weekly group.

Hicks concluded that the geographical compactness of all-weekly groups poses a greater potential for control and manipulation of news and editorial opinion by ownership.²¹

The trend of group purchases of weeklies is expected to continue in the 1980s. "Newspaper groups have moved into the community newspaper field in growing numbers, and there are no indications that this will change in the future," said Professor Gerald L. Grotta of Texas Christian University.²² Hicks estimated that one-third of weeklies in the United States was owned by newspaper groups.²³

Weekly newspapers wanting to remain independently owned often encounter pressure to accept buy-out offers. Estate taxes make it difficult to pass a family newspaper into the hands of a younger generation. The House of Representatives rejected the Independent Local Newspaper Act in 1979, which would have eased the estate tax burden on family newspaper heirs.²⁴

Independent weeklies face other pressures, too. According to the Wall Street Journal, "Shortages of working capital and a dearth of good business managers are frequent problems."²⁵

Newspaper observers are concerned about the high concentration of group ownership in the newspaper industry because they believe freedom of the press is threatened. The late Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black said in 1945 that the First Amendment is "the foundation upon which our government structure rests and without which it could not continue to endure." He said the First Amendment's provision of freedom of the press "rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public."²⁶

The late Justice Douglas warned that concentration of ownership adversely affects the amount of conflicting opinion published. Both he and Justice Black believed a diversity of conflicting opinions was necessary for the functioning of government.

Critics of newspaper groups fear group ownership because:

- 1) they believe it threatens local editorial autonomy;
- 2) they oppose the "concentrated economic power" some groups possess;
- 3) they resent the loss of hometown ownership and accountability;
- 4) they dislike

the "homogenized" content of group owned newspapers; 5) they fear a loss of diversity. And some critics see newspaper groups as a typification of big business.

Group owners and managers argue most groups guarantee editorial autonomy while raising the editorial standards of the newspapers they publish. They also claim groups usually better the editorial product of their acquisitions by expanding news departments and by improving the quality of printing, content and makeup.

Other benefits groups can offer to independent newspapers include business advice and technical assistance. Many independent newspapers cannot afford the legal advice, production capabilities and supplemental news services available to newspapers owned by groups. A group can provide its newspapers with managerial support, hiring recommendations and financial backing.

Group critics and group supporters might agree that the nature of ownership does affect the amount and type of editorial opinion published in newspapers. It is likely they would disagree on how ownership affects editorial opinion published by newspapers. This poses several questions.

First, do group owned weekly newspapers publish more column inches of editorials than independently owned weeklies? Second, do group weeklies publish editorials more frequently than independent weeklies? Third, do group weeklies publish more editorials on political topics than independent weeklies? Fourth, are group weeklies more likely to endorse candidates for political office than are independent weeklies? And fifth, do group weeklies print fewer

editorials on local topics and more editorials on national topics than do independent weeklies?

The second chapter of this study, following this introduction, is a search of the literature on the development of newspaper groups. The chapter discusses criticism and support of group ownership.

The third chapter presents the methodology of study. This chapter is concerned with units of analysis, sampling technique of Illinois weekly newspapers, operational definitions, research expectations, statistical techniques of analysis and a research instrument. Together they provide a methodological framework for the study of newspaper ownership and the weekly editorial in Illinois.

Analysis of the research and a report of the findings are presented in the fourth chapter. Statistical tables explain the relationship between the nature of newspaper ownership and editorials published by weekly newspapers.

The final chapter is the study's summary, conclusions and suggestions for further study. The results of this study indicate group owned weeklies publish editorials more frequently and publish more column inches of editorials than independently owned weeklies. Further, the results show that group weeklies publish more editorials in political contexts and are more likely to endorse candidates for political office than are independent weeklies. And the results indicate that independently owned weekly newspapers publish more editorials on local topics and fewer editorials on national topics than do group owned weeklies.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Special Report: Morning Circulation Tops P.M. Total for 155 Groups," Editor & Publisher, October 3, 1981, p. 12.

²Ronald G. Hicks, "Weekly Media Barons," Grassroots Editor, Winter 1981, p. 3.

³"1981 Facts About Newspapers," supplemental insert to Press-time, May 1981, pp. 28-29.

⁴Bruce M. Owen, Economics and Freedom of Expression, (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co. 1975), p. 33.

⁵D. Earl Newsom ed., The Newspaper: Everything You Need to Know to Make It in the Newspaper Business, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 2.

⁶"Old-Line Weeklies, Journalistic Bedrock, Are Feeling Tremors," Wall Street Journal, August 3, 1979, p. 1.

⁷Newsom, p. 229.

⁸Newsom, p. 229.

⁹Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigor of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, Summer 1977, p. 327.

¹⁰Gerard H. Borstel, "Ownership, Competition and Comment in 20 Small Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1956, p. 220.

¹¹William H. Jones and Laird Anderson, "The Newspaper Business," a reprint of a 12-part series of articles published by the Washington Post beginning July 24, 1977, p. 1.

¹²Gannetteer, April 1982, inside cover listings.

¹³Newsom, p. 229.

¹⁴"One-Hundred, Seventy-Five Weeklies Sold: Shopper Groups to Dailies," Editor & Publisher, January 6, 1979, p. 50.

¹⁵"Groups Gain 48 in Sales of 53 Dailies Sold in 1979," Editor & Publisher, January 5, 1980, p. 28.

¹⁶"Forty-Eight of 52 Dailies Sold in 1980 Join Group Ownership," Editor & Publisher, January 3, 1981; "Direct Mail and Cable Companies Buy Newspapers in Slow '81 Market," Editor & Publisher, January 2, 1982, p. 36.

17 "Old-Line Weeklies," p. 1.

18 Owen, p. 33.

19 Hicks, p. 3.

20 Hicks, p. 3.

21 Hicks, p. 3.

22 Newsom, p. 229.

23 Hicks, p. 3.

24 I. William Hill, "Tax Relief Bill to be Introduced," Editor & Publisher, March 17, 1979, p. 40.

25 "Old-Line Weeklies," p. 1.

26 John B. Oakes, "Concentrations of Press Power," Nieman Reports, Autumn 1978, pp. 26-31.

Chapter II

LITERATURE SEARCH

The phenomenon of newspaper groups has elicited criticism and support from newspaper observers. Some observers are critical of newspaper groups because they believe groups could affect freedom of the press in the United States. Other observers support the continued formation of groups because they claim groups improve the editorial content of the newspapers groups have acquired. Since this study looks at editorials published by weekly newspapers and how these editorials are affected by the nature of newspaper ownership, it was necessary to conduct a literature search.

American daily newspapers have increasingly become a group-owned enterprise during the twentieth century. Groups own 1,136 of 1,882 daily newspapers published in the United States, resulting in group control of 72 percent of total daily circulation.¹ Group ownership of American weeklies, estimated at one-third of all weekly newspapers, is expected to become more concentrated.² According to the Wall Street Journal, newspaper groups will acquire 175 weekly newspapers annually through the 1980s.³ If this is true, then groups will own three-fourths of all weeklies in the United States within 40 years at this rate of acquisition.

"Perhaps the most disturbing trend in the community field is the acquisition of newspapers by chains and the resultant absentee ownership," said D. Earl Newsom, a newspaper consultant and former professor of journalism.⁴ Although Newsom is not generally considered

an alarmist on the subject of newspaper groups, his apprehension is shared by other observers of newspapers.

The "most significant change" in the weekly field is the opportunity for individuals to purchase weekly newspapers, Texas Christian University Professor Gerald L. Grotta observed.⁵ He said "buying a newspaper is not a promising opportunity for an individual, unless that individual has enough money, preferably several million dollars, and expertise to compete with some of the biggest money and best minds in the business."⁶

Daily and weekly newspapers differ in their orientations toward their readerships. Bruce M. Kennedy, a former owner of Wyoming weeklies, said "daily news is a stream of the doings of strangers" while "weekly news is of friends and neighbors."⁷ Colorado journalist Houstoun Waring observed:⁸

"We have 1,700 dailies and 9,000 weeklies in this country. The dailies bring you news of the world; the weeklies normally print items about local people and events. An informed suburbanite or small town person must read both."

Newspaper groups have long had an image problem. Their early history is less than distinguished because of men like William Randolph Hearst, Edward Wyllis Scripps and Frank Munsey. Hearst, for example, built a group of daily newspapers partly because of his desire to be president of the United States. Hearst used his newspapers to settle personal grudges, "to preach ideology and to start wars."⁹

After the deaths of Hearst, Munsey and Scripps, newspaper groups were developed less for political motives and more for profit

motives as partisan journalism fell from public favor, said Edward N. Doan in a 1932 study.¹⁰ David Shaw, a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times, said what distinguishes a modern group executive such as Allen H. Neuharth of Gannett from the Hearst prototype is Neuharth's seemingly indifferent approach to politicians and political causes.¹¹ He said today's group owners and executives see their newspapers as products rather than podiums or pulpits.¹²

Newspaper groups, however, still elicit criticism. John B. Oakes, former editorial page editor of the New York Times, said he believes many groups permit their newspapers to publish with editorial autonomy. "This is not true of all chains and there is no guarantee that it will always be true of any," Oakes said. He observed that the threat of "centralized, remote control, of concentrated economic and editorial power," remains present.¹³

Some groups do dictate local editorial policy. For example, in 1977 the Panax group (six dailies and 29 non-dailies in Michigan, Illinois and Indiana) ordered its newspapers to publish two, front page articles critical of then-President Jimmy Carter. Two Panax editors who disobeyed the order were dismissed.¹⁴ Panax denied the accusation.¹⁵

The Scripps-Howard group, owner of 15 dailies with a total circulation of 1,498,925, is the eighth largest newspaper group in the United States.¹⁶ The group reported in the Scripps-Howard News how its dailies banded together to endorse Ronald Reagan for president;¹⁷

"Scripps-Howard editors, editorial management executives and trustees of The E.W. Scripps Trust met last month in Williamsburg, Va., and after more than several hours of discussion voted to endorse Republican Ronald Reagan for president in the November election."

"B.J. Cutler, editor in chief of Scripps-Howard Newspapers, wrote the endorsement based upon what the editors and executives said at that meeting. The first editorial, announcing the endorsement ... was written for release in Scripps-Howard daily newspapers Monday, Oct. 6."

The Panax incident and the blanket endorsement of Reagan by Scripps-Howard are examples of how newspaper groups can deny local autonomy to their newspapers. Such practices are often criticized by journalists and politicians.

Congressman Morris Udall, who introduced the Local Newspaper Act in 1979, said he favors legislation limiting the number of newspapers in a group. "We have to stop this insidious process before we have one or two people in the whole country telling us what to read and whom to vote for," Udall said.¹⁸ Udall, a Democrat, became critical of newspaper groups after his hometown newspaper, the Tucson Citizen, was purchased by Gannett.¹⁹

United States Senator Larry Pressler, like Udall, said he supports legislation that would break up large newspaper groups. "A Teddy Roosevelt era of trustbusting is needed to break up these media giants," Pressler said.²⁰ The South Dakota Republican claimed independent editors and newsmen were threatened with extinction.²¹

Pressler said he believes three "dangers" are posed by newspaper groups: 1) "the possible slanting of news if and when 20 or 30 people control all news in the country;" 2) "unfair competition in

which large corporations lower advertising rates to drive out competitors;" 3) "the example (newspaper groups) set for other industries."²²

The Canadian government showed its concern over concentrated newspaper ownership in that country by appointing a commission to analyze the effect of group ownership on freedom of the press. Newspaper ownership is more concentrated in Canada than in the United States. The Thomson and Southam groups control more than half of Canadian daily circulation.²³

The Royal Kent Commission, comprised of three Canadian journalists, issued a 296-page report in 1981. The report was sharply critical of group ownership in Canada. It said some Canadian groups maximized their profits "through the poverty of the content they provide their readers." The report said newspaper groups have "pervasive" power in shaping the editorial policies of their newspapers. To suggest that (groups) foster editorial independence is, as is said in French, "to dream in color."²⁴

The Kent Commission report caused a controversy in Canada because it urged the government to "partially dismantle" several newspaper groups. For example, it recommended that Thomson Newspapers Ltd. be forced to sell either the Toronto Globe and Mail, the country's only nationwide newspaper, or the group's 39 other Canadian dailies.²⁵

Kenneth Thomson, owner of the group begun by his father, said he would file a lawsuit if the recommendations were implemented. Thomson said the major recommendations of the Kent Commission

"constitute an unwarranted and retroactive interference with legitimate property rights."²⁶ The Thomson group remains intact.

There is support within the newspaper industry for government intervention and regulation of newspaper groups. Katherine Graham, former publisher of the Washington Post, said "nobody knows" the extent to which newspapers are being bought by larger companies. "You have an irreversible trend going and nothing can stop it short of government intervention," Graham said.²⁷

J. Hart Clinton, publisher of the family-owned San Mateo (Calif.) Times, said he believes the disappearance of the independent newspaper is not in the best interests of the United States. Clinton observed:²⁸

"The greater the diversity of editorial opinion and the greater the number of independent news-gathering organizations, the better the public interest is served. It appears to me that many chain newspapers are independent in name only because the editors tend toward a viewpoint which they believe will please the head office because they know where the bread is buttered."

Magazine editor Marvin L. Stone said the highly concentrated ownership of American newspapers is alarming because newspapers are more than "just another business." Stone, editor of the independently owned U.S. News and World Report, said newspapers "are primary sources of information for an educated public." He claimed that accountants will usurp editors in newsroom leadership roles "as the news business becomes more and more of a corporate enterprise." Stone said, "If profits go down, corporate managers looking for places to cut costs are likely to turn first to the newsroom which is not a revenue producer."²⁹

One of the harshest critics of newspaper groups is Ben H. Bagdikian, former Washington Post editor and media critic at-large. According to Bagdikian, no group was ever responsible for starting a great newspaper. He said he believes newspaper transactions have become a matter of groups "devouring" groups because most independent dailies "have been gobbled up." Bagdikian said he was particularly disturbed by the growth of conglomerate ownership in the newspaper industry. "In such a setting news can become a mere by-product and there is maximum potential for conflict-of-interest pressures," he said.³⁰

Newspaper critic Shaw, while not as prolific as Bagdikian, is equally articulate. Shaw observed:³¹

"Critics object, in principle, to the loss of diversity, autonomy, hometown identification and independence it (group ownership) represents; and they fear, in practice, the homogenization of the journalistic process that they say large newspaper chains could ultimately bring about."

Observers have criticized newspaper groups for a "noticeable tendency to do things on the cheap."³² Shaw said many publishers of group owned newspapers are guilty of "looking on their papers as cash registers, for producing newspapers that are too often timid, parochial and mediocre." He added if more group owned newspapers became less concerned with profits and more concerned with improving their products, "criticism of the chain phenomenon might diminish considerably among journalists and politicians alike."³³

"Homogenization" of editorial content of group newspapers was a concern of Doan 50 years ago. "Regional chains ... make for a more

complete standardization of content, both features and news," he said.³⁴ When Doan made that observation, newspaper groups did not own nearly the number of dailies and weeklies they do now.

Group executives sometimes answer such criticism by citing the dominance of their newspapers in recent Pulitzer Prize contests. Further, eight of the 10 best newspapers in the United States as rated by Time magazine are group owned, including the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.³⁵ The ownerships of both newspapers also publish weekly newspapers.

The positive effects of group ownership were cited by an unidentified editor who worked for Gannett:³⁶

"There aren't very many good, small independent papers in this country. So when a chain comes in, almost any chain, they really don't have to do much to improve it. Hell, even Freedom Newspapers, which we would hardly hold up as a good example of a chain, bought two small papers in North Carolina a few years ago and immediately improved them. They barely had a staff large enough to read the police blotter, cover the Rotary Club and pick up the wedding licenses and birth certificates before Freedom came in and spent a little money."

Group executives, such as Neuharth of Gannett, object to much of the criticism of their organizations. Neuharth said, "We believe completely in the concept of local autonomy, letting our individual editors and publishers decide their own news play and endorsements and everything else."³⁷ Unlike Scripps-Howard, the Gannett group demonstrated its concept of autonomy in the 1976 presidential election when 60 percent of its newspapers endorsed Gerald Ford while 40 percent supported Jimmy Carter.³⁸ In 1980 the Gannett newspapers split 51 percent for Ronald Reagan and 22

percent for President Carter. Independent candidate John Anderson was endorsed by 7 percent of Gannett's dailies, and 20 percent did not endorse.³⁹

Calvin Mayne, manager of Gannett's Information Services in 1974, explained how America's largest newspaper group viewed editorial autonomy:⁴⁰

"Gannett corporate executives ask group editors and publishers a lot of questions about how their newspapers spend and earn money, whom they're hiring or promoting, how fast they're converting to 'new technology,' and so on. But how the newspapers stand on this or that editorial policy is not one of the queries because that would violate the local autonomy that has been a keystone of Gannett policy ..."

Gannett's local autonomy policy, the topic of a 1967 study by George P. Evans, was defined as a Gannett newspaper's privilege to formulate its own editorial and news policy without direct control from the central office.⁴¹ The policy was conceived by group founder Frank Gannett with his first newspaper in 1906. Evans' study said Gannett newspapers publish within a measure of autonomy with a mild degree of direct office control. It concluded that the group's concept of local autonomy had not changed significantly since 1906.

Knight-Ridder President Alyah H. Chapman Jr. is another group executive who has answered criticism of newspaper groups. Those who lament the passing of independently owned newspapers are "remembering the good old days that never were," Chapman said.⁴² He observed:⁴³

"Many, many newspapers across this country were pervasively mediocre, unprofessional and timid. They often lacked the economic strengths, or will, to resist the special interests which called the shots in their communities."

A 1980 survey conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors supports the positions of Neuharth and Chapman. They indicated that group editors enjoyed more editorial freedom than did independent editors. It said one indication of greater editorial freedom among group editors was the survey's finding that group editors were less likely to consult with ownership about a controversial issue than were independent editors. According to the survey, group editors were more likely to determine their newspapers' endorsements for political office than were independent editors. Group-owned newspapers, the survey said, employed larger editorial staffs. The survey of group and independent editors had a response rate of 38 percent.⁴⁴

Similar findings were published in a 1974 study by Emily J. Auman of Ball State University. Her study examined the editorials of 16 Indiana newspapers. It said group owned newspapers published more editorials on state and local topics than did independently owned newspapers. The study said independent newspapers published approximately twice as many editorials on national subjects as they did on state and local subjects. Auman concluded that group owned and large circulation newspapers did a better job of localizing editorials.⁴⁵

Endorsements made during four presidential elections were analyzed in a 1975 study by Daniel B. Wackman and Donald M. Gillmor. It said group owned newspapers were more likely to endorse candidates than were independent newspapers in the elections that were studied (1960 to 1972). Group newspapers were found to be more likely to support the favored candidate of the press, the study said. And its data suggest that group owned newspapers were more consistent in their

support of press-favored candidates.⁴⁶

A 1980 survey of editorial page endorsements by the magazine The Masthead indicated group owned newspapers endorsed presidential candidates more frequently than independent newspapers. The survey said Ronald Reagan was the favorite of both group and independent newspapers.⁴⁷

There is more to the subject of group ownership of newspapers than the issues of local autonomy and editorial freedom. A 1972 study by Cathy S. Huck of Murray State University investigated the impact of corporate ownership on community newspapers in Kentucky and Indiana. It said printing quality improved while profits and advertising revenue both rose under corporate ownership. Overall, Huck's study said the content and makeup of the 23 newspapers owned by Newspapers, Inc. had improved under corporate ownership.⁴⁸

Concentrated economic power is another side of the subject of group ownership. A 1970 study by Grotta said if there were significant economic efficiencies from large-scale newspaper operations, then the benefits were not being passed on to consumers. Grotta's study offered evidence indicating consumers paid higher prices under consolidated ownership with no compensating increase in quality or quantity. It said concentration of newspaper ownership through merger and/or suspension may result in higher prices and lower quality through monopoly forces.⁴⁹

Monopoly control of a local advertising market prompted an antitrust suit against the Orlando Sentinel in 1982. The Sentinel, owned by the Chicago Tribune group, acquired all five existing weekly

newspapers in Osceola County, Fla., in 1980. The acquisition gave the Sentinel a 100 percent share of the print advertising market in Osceola County. The U.S. Justice Department said the purchases violated antitrust statutes, and it filed suit against the Sentinel to force the Florida daily to divest itself of the five weeklies. The case is expected to focus on the definition of a local advertising market. A decision was expected in late 1982.⁵⁰

Analyzing the effects of newspaper ownership goes beyond local autonomy and editorial freedom. But autonomy, or the lack of it, is one of the most frequently heard complaints about newspaper groups. Chapter III provides a methodology for this study of editorials published in a sample of weekly newspapers. Group owned and independently owned weeklies were included in the sample in order to determine how the nature of newspaper ownership affects the weekly editorial.

FOOTNOTES

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²⁶Clark Newsom, "Trudeau Aide Ponders Reply to Kent Report," Presstime, October 1981, p. 52.

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²⁸J. Hart Clinton, "Fate of Independents is Cause for Alarm," Presstime, May 1981, p. 23.

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³³Shaw, p. 15.

³⁴Doan, p. 329.

³⁵Jones and Anderson, p. 20.

³⁶Shaw, p. 12.

³⁷Shaw, p. 11.

³⁸Shaw, p. 11.

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Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the effect of newspaper ownership on editorials published by weekly newspapers. The editorial page is one place to look for the effect of newspaper ownership on editorial autonomy because it presents the viewpoint of newspapers.

This study uses quantitative analysis to investigate the relationship between the independent variable of weekly newspaper ownership and dependent variables such as column inches of editorials, frequency of editorials, subject of editorials, and editorial endorsement of candidates for political office. The study did not judge the quality of editorials published in the weekly newspapers sampled.

The population for the study was independent and group owned weekly newspapers published in Illinois. Excluded from the sample were daily, semi-weekly, tri-weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and other newspapers not published weekly. The Illinois 1982 Advertising Rate Book and Newspaper Directory published by the Illinois Press Association was used to determine what newspapers were weekly. It also was used to determine group owned newspapers. The directory lists 725 weekly and semi-weekly newspapers (those published twice weekly).¹ It gives a more complete list of Illinois weeklies than the '81 Ayer Directory of Publications, which lists 548 Illinois weeklies.²

Illinois was selected for the study for several reasons. Illinois has more weekly newspapers than any other state in the

Midwest.³ It has a large number of newspaper groups which publish weeklies, including Lakeland Newspapers, Lerner Newspapers, Paddock Publication, Peacock Publishing, Pioneer Press, Southtown Economist Newspapers, and many smaller groups. And the author is familiar with weeklies in the state.

The weeklies were examined in the microfilm collection at the Illinois State Historical Library at Springfield. The library holds the largest collection of Illinois newspapers; it receives 300 newspapers on a subscription basis, including approximately 170 Illinois weeklies.⁴

All Illinois weeklies available at the library were examined. One-hundred and two weeklies were excluded because they did not publish editorials during the study's 13-week period or they were unavailable because some copies were missing. Seventy weeklies were included in the sample. Twenty-five newspapers were classified as independently owned; 45 newspapers were classified as group owned.

A newspaper group was defined as ownership and publication of two or more newspapers in more than one city.

Newspapers published between Oct. 1, 1980 and Dec. 31, 1980, were studied. The study period included Christmas, Thanksgiving, Veterans' Day, Halloween, the 1980 presidential campaign and a state-wide race for the United States Senate. Other possible editorial topics in the period were campaigns for congressional, legislative and county offices, two proposed amendments to the state constitution,

National Newspaper Week, the anniversary of the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor, the passing of 1980 and the coming of 1981. Plus some weeklies routinely publish editorials on subjects of local, state, national, and international interest.

Based on the previously stated relationship between the independent variable of newspaper ownership and the various dependent variables, the author expected the study to support the following statements:

- 1) Group owned newspapers print more column inches of editorials than independently owned weekly newspapers.
- 2) Group owned weeklies publish editorials more frequently than independently owned weeklies.
- 3) Group owned weeklies publish more editorials on political topics than independently owned weeklies.
- 4) Group owned weeklies devote more space to political editorials than independently owned weeklies.
- 5) Group owned weeklies are more likely to endorse candidates for political office than are independently owned weeklies.
- 6) Group owned weeklies print fewer editorials on local topics and more editorials on national topics than independently owned weeklies.

The operational definitions needed to conduct this study are weekly newspaper, large newspaper group, small newspaper group, independently owned weekly, column inch, political editorial, local editorial, state editorial, national editorial, and international editorial.

The definitions large newspaper group and small newspaper group were used to determine if the editorial practices of small group weeklies were more like those of large newspaper groups or

independently owned weeklies.

WEEKLY NEWSPAPER: Those newspapers designated as weekly by the Illinois Press Association directory.

LARGE NEWSPAPER GROUP: The publication of three or more weekly newspapers in more than one city or community under the ownership of the same person or persons.

SMALL NEWSPAPER GROUP: The publication of two weekly newspapers in more than one city or community under the ownership of the same person or persons.

INDEPENDENTLY OWNED WEEKLY: The ownership and publication of one weekly newspaper in only one city or community by an owner who does not own any other newspapers. Shopper publications, defined here as free-circulation periodicals comprised of advertising, were not considered as newspapers in this study.

COLUMN INCH: A measurement based on a standard, six-column newspaper format with 13-pica columns that are 21 inches deep. Measurements of other formats, such as tabloid or eight-column formats, were converted to a six-column, 13-pica format for data collection purposes.

NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL: The publication of an original opinion column written by a staff member which reflects a newspaper's view on an issue or event and appears in approximately the same place or on the editorial page or section. Exchange editorials from other newspapers, reprinted editorials and by-lined columns expressing only the personal opinion of a newspaper staff member were not considered

editorials in this study. Personal opinion columns were excluded because they do not always represent a newspaper's editorial view on an issue or an event.

POLITICAL EDITORIAL: The publication of an editorial on topics involving politicians or political affairs at the local, state, national or international level.

Four mutually exclusive definitions were used to classify editorials examined in the study.

LOCAL EDITORIAL: The publication of an editorial on a topic within a community, village, township, city, or county.

STATE EDITORIAL: The publication of an editorial on an Illinois topic outside a community, village, township, city, or county, including topics on Illinois politicians or political affairs at the state government level.

NATIONAL EDITORIAL: The publication of an editorial on a topic involving the United States rather than Illinois or a foreign country.

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIAL: The publication of an editorial on a topic involving a foreign country or the United States' involvement with one.

Seven sets of crossbreaks, or numerical tables, were constructed to analyze data collected in this study. Each set contained three crossbreaks comparing large group weeklies with independent weeklies, small group weeklies with independent weeklies, and group owned weeklies with independent weeklies. The study relied on a definition of a crossbreak given by Fred N. Kerlinger of New York University;⁵

"A crossbreak is a numerical tabular presentation of data, usually in frequency or percentage form, in which variables are cross-partitioned in order to study the relations between them. It is a common form of analysis that can be used with almost any kind of data."

To determine if group owned weeklies printed more column inches of editorials than independent weeklies, a crossbreak with two rows and three columns (2x3) was constructed. The columns represented less than 20 column inches of editorials published during the study period, 20 to 40 column inches and more than 40 column inches.

Another set of crossbreaks with two rows and four columns (2x4) was constructed to determine if group owned weeklies published more editorials on national topics and fewer editorials on local topics than independently owned weeklies. The four columns were used to total the number of local, state, national, and international editorials.

A third set of crossbreaks with two rows and two columns (2x2) was constructed to determine if group owned weeklies published editorials more frequently than independently owned weeklies. The two columns separated newspapers that published editorials less than once a week from newspapers that published editorials weekly.

A fourth set of crossbreaks, having two rows and three columns (2x3), was designed to determine if group owned weeklies were more likely to make political endorsements than independent weeklies. The three columns separated newspapers favoring passage of a proposed amendment to reduce the size of the Illinois legislature from newspapers opposing the amendment and from newspapers taking a neutral

position on the amendment.

The three remaining sets of crossbreaks contained two rows and two columns (2x2). One set was constructed to determine if group owned newspapers printed more editorials on political topics than independently owned weeklies. The columns separated political editorials from those classified as non-political editorials.

To determine if group owned weeklies devoted more space to political editorials than independently owned weeklies, a set of crossbreaks separating by column the number of political editorials and total column inches of political editorials was designed.

A seventh set of crossbreaks was constructed to determine if group owned weeklies were more likely to endorse candidates for political office than were independently owned weeklies. The columns separated newspapers endorsing candidates from newspapers not endorsing candidates.

A chi square value was calculated for each crossbreak table of data to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between the independent variable newspaper ownership and the various dependent variables mentioned earlier. According to Kerlinger, "The function of statistical tests is to compare obtained results with those to be expected on the basis of chance."⁶ He said the chi square test is "one of the simplest and yet most useful of statistical tests."⁷

The .05 level of significance was considered acceptable for the purpose of this study because of the size of its sample. It means an obtained result that is significant at the .05 level could occur by

chance only five times in 100 trials. Kerlinger observed:⁸

"The .05 level ... has persisted with researchers because it is considered a reasonably good gamble. It is neither too high nor too low for most social scientific research."

FOOTNOTES

¹Illinois 1982 Advertising Rate Book and Newspaper Directory, (Illinois Press Association, Springfield: 1982), p. 1.

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³'81 Ayer Directory of Publications, pp. 294, 357, 376, 394, 446, 468, 520, 702, 809, and 910.

⁴Illinois Libraries, (Illinois State Library, Springfield), Vol. 61, No. 2, February 1979, p. 81.

⁵Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973, 2nd ed.), pp. 159-160.

⁶Kerlinger, p. 166.

⁷Kerlinger, p. 167.

⁸Kerlinger, p. 170.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis of data in this study showed the independent variable of newspaper ownership had different effects on the editorial practices of independently owned and group owned newspapers. Further, analysis also showed ownership had different effects on the editorial practices of weekly newspapers owned by small groups and weekly newspapers owned by large groups.

The study examined 699 editorials published by 70 Illinois weeklies. The sample included 25 independently owned newspapers and 45 group owned newspapers. Of the 45 group owned weeklies, 21 were published by small groups and 24 were published by large groups, or those groups owning three or more weekly newspapers. Some of the differences found among the three types were determined to be statistically significant at the .05 level.

For example, the 25 independently owned weeklies showed the strongest editorial orientation toward local and state editorial topics. They published more editorials on local and state topics than either the small group or large group weeklies in the sample.

The 45 group owned weeklies editorialized more often, published more column inches of editorials and endorsed candidates for political office more frequently than the independently owned weeklies. The group owned weeklies also published more editorials on national topics and fewer editorials on state and local topics than the independent weeklies.

Large group weeklies, considered apart from the small group weeklies, published more editorials on national topics and fewer editorials on state and local topics. Large group weeklies also were more likely to endorse candidates for political office than were small group newspapers.

The weeklies published by small groups devoted more space to editorials than the large group newspapers. They also published more editorials on international topics than either large group or independently owned weeklies.

Analysis of the data showed little difference between independent and group owned weeklies in the length or number of political editorials published. Nor was there much difference in their editorial positions on the proposed amendment to reduce the size of the Illinois House of Representatives, also known as the cutback amendment.

The independent variable of newspaper ownership had its strongest effect on the dependent variable of editorial orientation. This difference in editorial orientation between independent and group owned weeklies was the most meaningful finding of the study.

Both independent and group weeklies published editorials on national topics more often than on any other topic. However, almost half of the group weekly editorials were written on national topics. The independent weeklies published slightly more editorials on national topics than on local topics. The independent weeklies also published more editorials on state topics and fewer editorials on international topics than the group owned weeklies.

Table 1 shows the incidence of editorial topics as calculated by percentages. Further analysis of the data, as shown in Table 2, indicated that the difference in editorial orientation was greatest between independent weeklies and large group weeklies. The chi square values calculated for Tables 1 and 2 were statistically significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 1

Percent of Editorial Topics
Published by Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	PERCENT OF EDITORIAL TOPICS PUBLISHED			
	Local	State	National	International
Group owned weekly newspapers	168 (31.88%)	78 (14.80%)	263 (49.90%)	18 (3.42%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	66 (38.37%)	33 (19.19%)	72 (41.86%)	1 (0.58%)

$$\chi^2 = 8.786$$

$$DF = 3$$

$$p = 7.815$$

TABLE 2

Percent of Editorial Topics
Published by Independently Owned
and Large-Group Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	PERCENT OF EDITORIAL TOPICS PUBLISHED			
	Local	State	National	International
Large-group weeklies newspapers	74 (30.98%)	35 (14.23%)	129 (52.44%)	8 (3.25%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	66 (38.37%)	33 (19.19%)	72 (41.86%)	1 (0.58%)

$$\chi^2 = 9.316$$

$$DF = 3$$

$$p = 7.815$$

A possible explanation of this difference in editorial orientation is the editorial staffs of the newspapers. Editorials in weekly newspapers are often written by publishers or editors who spend most of their time on other newspaper responsibilities. Because independently owned newspapers tend to be family-owned enterprises, they experience less staff turnover. Editorial writers working for independent weeklies are more likely to be familiar with local issues because the writers have lived in their communities longer than writers who work for group owned newspapers. This longevity may make writers for independent weeklies more comfortable in writing about local issues.

An apparent reluctance of group owned weeklies to endanger their economic security and community goodwill by editorializing on sensitive, local topics is still another possible explanation of this difference in orientation. Instead, group weeklies might concentrate on national editorial topics because such topics are less likely to disrupt established business accounts and community tranquility.

These results support the findings of a 1973 qualitative study of local and non-local editorials by David Santos. His study of editorials in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, the St. Louis Globe Democrat, the Sacramento Bee, and the Sacramento Union, offered evidence that all four newspapers treated "state" issues less forcefully than other issues.¹ The study's sample of 70 Illinois weeklies published up to three times more editorials on local and national topics than on state topics.

The results also show the Illinois weeklies were similar in editorial orientation to Wyoming newspapers studied by Kathy Jo Rem. Rem's 1975 findings showed that the majority of editorials published by Wyoming newspapers was done on national topics, and that Wyoming weeklies did two and a half times more local editorializing than did Wyoming dailies.² Like the Wyoming newspapers, both the independent and group weeklies in the study published more editorials on national topics than on any other area.

Unlike the sample of Illinois weeklies, a 1973 study of Indiana dailies offered evidence that daily newspapers editorialized most heavily on national topics, regardless of ownership. The Indiana study, conducted by Emily J. Auman, found that group owned Indiana dailies published more editorials on state and local topics than did independent dailies in the study.³ Auman's sample of Indiana dailies, however, resembled Illinois weeklies in that they published few editorials on international topics.

This study's finding that independently owned Illinois weeklies published more local editorials than group weeklies is supported by a 1955 study conducted by Gerard H. Borstel. Although the passage of time may make Borstel's findings suspect, his study of 20 dailies offered early evidence that independent newspapers have a stronger editorial orientation toward their home communities.⁴ However, Borstel's study concluded that group owned dailies stressed local subjects in editorials to about the same degree as independent dailies.

The editorial orientation of all weeklies in the study was similar to the orientation of Minnesota community newspapers studied

by Walter Brovald. His 1977 study of Minnesota weeklies and semi-weeklies said about 40 percent of "locally written editorials dealt with local subjects."⁵ About 38 percent of the editorials published by this study's independent weeklies and about 32 percent of the group weekly editorials were written on local topics.

The independent variable of ownership also had a strong effect on the dependent variable of column inches of editorials published. The group owned weeklies in this study published significantly more column inches of editorials. Table 3 shows that well over three-fourths of the group weeklies published more than 40 column inches of editorials during the study period. Of the independent weeklies in the sample, less than half published 40 or more column inches of editorials during the period. And the difference remained statistically significant at the .05 level when the independent weeklies were compared to the large group weeklies in Table 4 and to the small group weeklies in Table 5.

TABLE 3

Column Inches of Editorials
Published in Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	COLUMN INCHES OF EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN 13-WEEKS		
	Less than 20"	20 to 40 inches	More than 40"
Group-owned weekly newspapers	5 (11.11%)	4 (8.89%)	36 (80.0%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	8 (32.0%)	6 (24.0%)	11 (44.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 9.447$$

$$DF = 2$$

$$p = 5.991$$

TABLE 4

Column Inches of Editorials Published
in Independent and Large-Group Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	COLUMN INCHES OF EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN 13-WEEKS		
	Less than 20"	20 to 40 inches	More than 40"
Large-group weekly newspapers	3 (12.50%)	2 (8.33%)	19 (79.17%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	8 (32.0%)	6 (24.0%)	11 (44.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 6.388$$

$$DF = 2$$

$$P = 5.991$$

TABLE 5

Column Inches of Editorials Published
in Independent and Small-Group Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	COLUMN INCHES OF EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN 13-WEEKS		
	Less than 20"	20 to 40 inches	More than 40"
Small-Group weekly newspapers	2 (9.52%)	2 (9.52%)	17 (80.96%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	8 (32.0%)	6 (24.0%)	11 (44.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 6.587$$

$$DF = 2$$

$$p = 5.991$$

This difference in editorial column inches can be partially explained by the newspaper group practice of sharing a common editorial page. For example, newspapers in the Auburn Citizen group, including the Divernon News, the Pawnee Post, and the Chatham Clarion, published the same editorials originally written for the Auburn Citizen. Still, not all editorials published in the Citizen were used by the other three newspapers.

Similarly, editorials from the Orion Times, published by the Atkinson-Annawan group, appeared in the Wyoming Post-Herald and the (Princeville) Telephone. Following a similar practice were weekly newspapers in the Virden Recorder group, including the Recorder, the Girard Gazette, the Panhandle Press of Farmersville, and the North-western News of Palmyra.

Among the study's small group weeklies, the Gibson City Courier and the Piatt County Journal-Republican of Monticello shared editorial pages that were identical except for their nameplates. The Galva News and the WROVA Reporter, two other weeklies published by a small group, also shared nearly identical editorial pages.

One large Illinois newspaper group not adhering to the practice of editorial sharing was Pioneer Press, Inc., owned by Time magazine. The two Pioneer weeklies in the study, the Oak Leaves of Oak Park and the Franklin Park Journal, published separate editorial pages. The Franklin Park Journal published more non-political editorials and remained neutral during the 1980 general election. The Oak Leaves published more political editorials and it editorially endorsed candidates for political office in 1980. The two Pioneer weeklies did

not share any editorials during the study period.

Two weeklies published by a small group, the Moultrie County News and the Sullivan Progress, also had separate editorial pages. During the study period, the News editorialized against the cutback amendment while the Progress editorially supported it. The two weeklies, published in Sullivan, Ill., have since merged to form a semi-weekly known as the News-Progress.

Another possible explanation of this difference in column inches is the number of independent weeklies in the study which published only one editorial during the study period. Six independent weeklies, accounting for 24 percent of the sample, published one editorial during the 13-week period. Those weeklies included the Kinmundy Express, the Minonk News-Dispatch, the Milford Herald-News, the Walnut Leader, the Mendota Reporter, and the Register of Sandoval.

Of the remaining independent weeklies, the Mahomet Citizen and the Mirror Democrat of Mount Carroll published only two editorials during the period. The two weeklies accounted for eight percent of the sample of independent weeklies.

Comparatively, five group weeklies, or about 11 percent of the sample, editorialized only once during the study period. Those weeklies were the Marissa Messenger, the Washburn Leader, the Manhattan American, the Tazewell Reporter, and the Henry News Republican. In addition, three group weeklies representing nearly seven percent of the sample, editorialized only twice during the period of study. A higher percentage of independent weeklies in the study editorialized less often than the group weeklies did.

The finding that group owned weeklies published more column inches of editorials is supported by a recent American Society of Newspaper Editors survey. The survey, published in 1980, said group owned newspapers employed larger editorial staffs than independent newspapers. The survey concluded that group editors enjoyed greater editorial freedom because they were less likely to consult with ownership about a controversial issue than were independent editors.⁶

The independent variable of ownership also was found to affect the frequency of editorial publication. According to Table 6, nearly one-half of the group owned weeklies published editorials once a week. Less than one-quarter of the independently owned weeklies published editorials weekly. The difference was statistically significant at the .05 level between independent and small group weeklies but not between independent and large group weeklies. Possible explanations of the difference have already been mentioned, including the group practices of sharing editorials and of hiring larger editorial staffs.

Tables 6 and 7 show the independent variable of ownership as having a statistically significant effect. Table 8, comparing independent weeklies to large group weeklies, shows a chi square value that is meaningful but not statistically significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 6

Frequency With Which Editorials
Are Published in Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	FREQUENCY WITH WHICH EDITORIALS ARE PUBLISHED	
	Less than once a week	At least once a week
Group-owned weekly newspapers	23 (51.12%)	22 (48.88%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	20 (80.0%)	5 (20.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 5.660$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

TABLE 7

Frequency With Which Editorials
Are Published in Independent and Small-Group Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	FREQUENCY WITH WHICH EDITORIALS ARE PUBLISHED	
	Less than once a week	At least once a week
Small-Group weekly newspapers	10 (47.62%)	11 (52.38%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	20 (80.0%)	5 (20.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 5.275$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

TABLE 8

Frequency With Which Editorials
Are Published in Independent and Large-Group Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	FREQUENCY WITH WHICH EDITORIALS ARE PUBLISHED	
	Less than once a week	At least once a week
Large-Group weekly newspapers	13 (54.16%)	11 (45.84%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	20 (80.0%)	5 (20.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 3.715$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

The economic efficiencies of newspaper group operations might explain the differences between the independent and group weeklies in editorial length and frequency. A 1972 study by Cathy S. Huck investigated the corporate effects of ownership on 23 community newspapers owned by Newspaper, Inc. in Kentucky and Indiana. Huck concluded that the content and makeup of the newspapers had improved under corporate ownership.⁷ Small group weeklies in this study were found to editorialize more often than large group weeklies. The difference was possibly due to the greater economic efficiencies of small newspaper groups.

For example, a 1973 study said the Gannett newspaper group, numerically the largest group in the United States, "retarded" the editorial performance of the Lansing (Mich.) State Journal partly through cutbacks in editorial department positions.⁸ John A. Kaufman studied changes in the editorial performance of the State Journal after it was acquired by Gannett in 1971. He concluded that Gannett improved the editorial performance partly through expanded editorial freedom and "cosmetic changes."

The variable of ownership had a statistically significant effect in the endorsement policies of large group weeklies, as shown by the data in Tables 9 and 10. Again, this effect could be explained by the larger editorial staffs and the practice of sharing editorials by group owned newspapers.

The small group weeklies in the sample were found to be more like independent weeklies in their endorsements of political candidates. Nearly 62 percent of the small group newspapers remained

editorially neutral during the 1980 general election; 72 percent of the independent weeklies did not endorse candidates. Further, there was a meaningful but not a statistically significant difference between the endorsement policies of the independent and of all group owned weeklies in the study, as shown in Table 9.

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	EDITORIAL POLICY OF ENDORSING CANDIDATES	
	Weeklies endorsing	Neutral weeklies
Group-owned weekly newspapers	28 (48.89%)	23 (51.11%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	7 (28.0%)	18 (72.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 2.890$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 0.941$$

TABLE 9

Editorial Policies of Illinois Weeklies
and the Endorsement of Candidates for Political Office

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	EDITORIAL POLICY OF ENDORSING CANDIDATES	
	Weeklies endorsing	Neutral weeklies
Group-owned weekly newspapers	22 (48.89%)	23 (51.11%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	7 (28.0%)	18 (72.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 2.890$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

TABLE 10

Editorial Policies of Independent and Large-Group Weeklies
and the Endorsement of Candidates for Political Office

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	EDITORIAL POLICY OF ENDORSING CANDIDATES	
	Weeklies endorsing	Neutral weeklies
Large-Group weekly newspapers	14 (58.33%)	10 (41.67%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	7 (28.0%)	18 (72.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 4.600$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

Previous studies support the finding that group owned newspapers are more likely to endorse political candidates. A 1980 survey of editorial page endorsements by The Masthead, "Endorsement Surprises" (Spring 1980), said more group owned newspapers endorsed presidential candidates than did independently owned newspapers.⁹ An analysis of endorsements for four presidential elections (1960 to 1972) by Daniel B. Wackman and Donald M. Gillmor said group owned newspapers were more likely to make endorsements than were independently owned newspapers.¹⁰ The Wackman and Gillmor study found that group owned newspapers also were more likely to support "the favored candidate of the press." And a 1975 study by John M. English said only a few Missouri newspapers located in rural counties made endorsements, and fewer still endorsed candidates for county or district offices.¹¹

The variable of ownership had a statistically significant effect only on the candidate endorsements of large group weeklies. However, it was found to have a meaningful effect regarding the editorial positions of small group weeklies on the proposed cutback amendment. This turnabout could be explained by an apparent hesitancy of small group weeklies to editorialize on a political candidacy. Some of the small group weeklies in the study might have felt freer to take a forceful position on a non-partisan amendment to the Illinois Constitution.

The difference between independent weeklies and all the group weeklies in their positions on the amendment was not statistically significant. Both types had about 40 percent taking an editorial position and about 60 percent remaining neutral.

TABLE 11

Editorial Position of Illinois Weeklies
and the Proposed Amendment to Reduce the Legislature

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	EDITORIAL STANCE AND THE CUTBACK AMENDMENT		
	Favoring	Opposing	Neutral
Group-owned weekly newspapers	11 (24.44%)	7 (15.56%)	27 (60.0%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	4 (16.0%)	6 (24.0%)	15 (60.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 1.151$$

$$DF = 2$$

$$p = 5.991$$

TABLE 12

Editorial Position of Small-Group and Independent Weeklies
and the Proposed Amendment to Reduce the Legislature

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	EDITORIAL STANCE AND THE CUTBACK AMENDMENT		
	Favoring	Opposing	Neutral
Small-Group weekly newspapers	9 (42.85%)	2 (9.54%)	10 (47.61%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	4 (16.0%)	6 (24.0%)	15 (60.0%)

$$\chi^2 = 4.610$$

$$DF = 2$$

$$p = 5.991$$

Analysis of the data also found that the variable of ownership had little effect on the number of political editorials published by the newspapers in the study. More than one-half of the editorials published by independent and group weeklies were written on political topics. Nor did ownership have much effect on the length of political editorials. The average length of political editorials published by the group weeklies was 13.21 inches. Political editorials in the independent weeklies averaged 11.52 inches in length.

Table 13 shows the effect of the independent variable of ownership on the dependent variable of political editorials published. The effect of ownership on the length of political editorials published by the weeklies in the study is shown in Table 14. In neither case was ownership found to have a meaningful effect.

TABLE 13

Percent of Political Editorials
Published by Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	PERCENT OF POLITICAL EDITORIALS PUBLISHED	
	Political Editorials	Non-Political Editorials
Group-owned weekly newspapers	298 (56.54%)	229 (43.46%)
Independently owned weekly newspapers	89 (51.74%)	83 (48.26%)

$$\chi^2 = 1.210$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

TABLE 14

Frequency and Length of Political Editorials
Published by Illinois Weeklies

NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP	POLITICAL EDITORIALS PUBLISHED DURING 13-WEEKS	
	Number of editorials	Column inches of edit's
Group-owned weekly newspapers	299	3,951
Independently owned weekly newspapers	89	1,027

$$\chi^2 = 1.163$$

$$DF = 1$$

$$p = 3.841$$

The findings do indicate that this sample of Illinois weeklies published more editorials on political topics than a 1962 sample of non-daily Iowa newspapers. A study conducted by Wilbur Peterson and Robert Thorp said political editorials accounted for 24.4 percent of all editorial page editorials in the Iowa newspapers they sampled.¹⁴ This study found political editorials accounted for 55.3 of all editorials published by the sample of Illinois weeklies. The difference could be explained by the fact that 1980 was a presidential election year.

Further, of the 172 Illinois weeklies examined for the study, 102 were excluded because they did not publish editorials during the period of study. Only 40.7 percent of the weeklies considered for the study published editorials. The finding seems to agree with the Peterson and Thorp study, which found 41 percent of the 215 Iowa non-dailies with editorial pages. Peterson and Thorp compared their findings with a similar 1930 study, which found 63 percent of the sampled Iowa non-dailies with editorial pages.¹⁵

Similar findings were reported in a 1961 study by J. C. Sims. His study found 45.5 percent of all American weeklies, semi-weeklies, and tri-weeklies carried editorials regularly. Another 20 percent were found to print editorials "occasionally." Sims' report said 51 percent of West Virginia weeklies editorialized, Ohio 45 percent, Minnesota 44 percent, Georgia 50 percent, and Washington 46 percent.¹⁶ "Where specific information is lacking," Sims said, "even experienced observers of the press tend to over-estimate the number of U.S. weeklies which regularly carry editorials."¹⁷

In a 1965 article for Grassroots Editor, Walter Stewart estimated that "hardly 50 percent of the nation's weeklies now editorialize."¹⁸ Stewart examined 37 Idaho weeklies and semi-weeklies, and he found that less than half (46 percent) published editorials.

The finding that 40 percent of a sample of Illinois weeklies published editorials seems to be supported.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹David Santos, "A Qualitative Study of the Forcefulness of Local and Non-Local Editorials," unpublished master's thesis, California State University, Fresno, 1973, adviser: Dayle Molen.
- ²Kathy Jo Rem, "Quantitative Analysis of Editorial Content of Eight Wyoming Daily and Weekly Newspapers," unpublished master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1975, adviser: William J. Roepke.
- ³Emily J. Auman, "Content Analysis of Editorials in 16 Chained and Unchained Indiana Newspapers," unpublished master's thesis, Ball State University, 1973, adviser: Mark Popovich.
- ⁴Gerard H. Borstel, "Ownership, Competition and Comment in 20 Small Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1956, p. 220.
- ⁵Walter Brovald, "Controversy Rare Topic," Grassroots Editor, Spring 1981, p. 6.
- ⁶Jerry Walker, "ASNE Poll Finds Group Editors Have Freedom," Editor & Publisher, March 29, 1980, p. 7.
- ⁷Cathy S. Huck, "Newspapers, Inc.: The Impact of Corporate Ownership on its Community Newspapers," unpublished master's thesis, Murray State University, 1972, adviser: L.J. Horton.
- ⁸John A. Kaufman, "The (Lansing) State Journal as a Gannett Property: An Inquiry into and Evaluation of Editorial Performance Under Gannett Co. Ownership," unpublished master's thesis, Michigan State University, 1973, adviser: George A. Hough III.
- ⁹"Endorsement Surprises," The Masthead, Spring 1981, p. 44.
- ¹⁰Daniel B. Wackman, Donald M. Gillmor et al., "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements," Journalism Quarterly, Autumn 1975, p. 411.
- ¹¹John M. English, "The Relationship of Newspaper Editorial Endorsements of Certain County and District Candidates, Newspaper Partisanship, and the Vote Share in Rural Missouri Counties During the '68, '70, '72, and '74 General Elections," unpublished master's thesis, Central Missouri State University, 1975, adviser: David Martinson.
- ¹²John Consoli, "E & P Poll: Reagan Backed by 443 Dailies," Editor & Publisher, November 1, 1980, p. 9.
- ¹³George Wilt, "411 Dailies Support Ford; 80 for Carter; 168 Newspapers are Uncommitted," Editor & Publisher, October 30, 1976, p. 5.

¹⁴Wilbur Peterson and Robert Thorp, "Weeklies Editorial Effort Less than 30 Years Ago," Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1962, p. 53.

¹⁵Peterson and Thorp, p. 53.

¹⁶J.C. Sims, "Use of Editorials in U.S. Dailies and Weeklies," Journalism Quarterly, Summer 1961, p. 375.

¹⁷Sims, p. 375.

¹⁸Walter Stewart, "Editorials," Grassroots Editor, April 1965, p. 18.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

A reader will find more editorials on local topics in independently owned weekly newspapers than in group owned weeklies.

This was one of the major conclusions in this study of 699 editorials that appeared in 70 Illinois weeklies. The editorials were analyzed to determine how group ownership affected the editorials published by weekly newspapers.

The study found that group owned weeklies published more editorials on national and international topics, published longer editorials and published them more frequently than independently owned weeklies. The independent newspapers showed a significantly greater orientation toward local and state editorial topics. They published fewer column inches of editorials and editorialized less often than group weeklies. Other differences in editorials published by the 25 independent weeklies and the 45 group weeklies in the sample were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

One reason why this study was done is because of the criticism of group ownerships. John B. Oakes, former editorial page editor of the New York Times, said most but not all newspaper groups permit their newspapers to publish with editorial autonomy.¹ More critical of newspaper groups are United States Senator Larry Pressler of South Dakota and Congressman Morris Udall of Arizona. They have said they would support legislation limiting the number of newspapers in a

group.² Both men said they believe newspaper groups have the potential to control the news in the United States.³

Newspaper groups have fallen under political scrutiny because some groups dictate local editorial policy. In 1977, two editors in the Panax newspaper group reportedly were fired for defying an order to publish two, front page articles critical of then-President Jimmy Carter, an accusation Panax has denied.⁴ The Scripps-Howard newspaper group has publicly stated its editorial management determines whom its 15 dailies endorse in presidential elections.⁵ The actions of Panax and Scripps-Howard elicit criticism of newspaper groups because they have denied local autonomy to their member newspapers.

A second reason this study was done is because the independent daily newspaper is disappearing in the United States. As a result newspaper groups are acquiring weekly newspapers. D. Earl Newsom, a newspaper consultant, said group acquisition of weeklies and the resultant absentee ownership is "perhaps the most disturbing trend in the community (newspaper) field."⁶ According to newspaper transaction figures compiled by Editor & Publisher, groups have purchased 245 or 53.3 percent of the 459 weeklies and advertising shoppers sold in 1979 and 1980.⁷

Ronald G. Hicks, a former weekly publisher, estimated in Grassroots Editor that newspaper groups now own one-third of all weeklies in the United States.⁸ Some of the largest newspaper groups own weeklies, including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Des Moines Register, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, plus the

Gannett newspaper group, numerically the largest newspaper group in the United States.⁹

A third reason is the emergence of rural and suburban all-weekly groups. Hicks said all-weekly groups pose a greater potential for control and manipulation of news and editorial opinion by ownership because of their geographic compactness.¹⁰

A fourth reason this study was done is because weekly newspapers are often considered the "bedrock" of American journalism.¹¹ The approximately 9,000 United States weeklies have an estimated circulation of 38 million and a readership estimated as high as 150 million.¹² They are an important medium in American journalism and an important source of information for more than one-half of the United States population.

The author concluded that group ownership of weekly newspapers poses a threat to local autonomy and editorial freedom because of the finding that group owned weeklies published significantly fewer editorials on local and state topics. Avoiding local editorial topics results in a loss of diversity of local opinion. The finding that group weeklies editorialized less frequently on local issues suggests they are more concerned with editorializing on national topics. And analysis of the data collected suggests the larger the newspaper group, the less frequently its weekly newspapers editorialize on local topics.

Further, the author concluded that the group practice of sharing common editorials and editorial pages threatens freedom of the press by denying local autonomy. The practice results in homogenized

editorials and editorial pages that cannot provide the local opinion that independent weeklies can offer.

The finding that group weeklies published more column inches of editorials and published editorials more frequently would seem to suggest they take their editorial writing more seriously than independent weeklies. Quantity of editorials, however, is not necessarily a guarantee of editorial autonomy.

For example, the group owned Orion Times published 149 column inches of editorials during the period of study. Comparatively, the independent Kinmundy Express published one editorial measuring four column inches during the period. Although the quantity of editorials in the Times is impressive, the weekly failed to editorialize on any topic of local interest during the period. And while the Express published one editorial in 13 weeks, its sole editorial was written on the local topic of parental responsibility for Halloween vandalism. Despite the paucity of editorials in the Express, the newspaper at least showed a sense of community responsibility that is often lacking in editorials on national topics.

Similarly, the Chicago-based New Crusader, published by the Lerner newspaper group, editorialized every week during the period of study. However, the only time the black community weekly touched upon a local editorial issue was to urge deferment of a local tax increase. The weekly did endorse candidates for political office in Cook County, Ill., but those endorsements were subordinate to endorsements of national and state candidates published higher in a 45-inch editorial.

Interestingly enough, the New Crusader was the only weekly in the study to endorse the presidential candidacy of Jimmy Carter. Of the 15 other weeklies making presidential endorsements, Illinois native Ronald Reagan was the unanimous choice. The candidacy of another Illinois native, former Congressman John Anderson of Rockford, went unendorsed.

The finding that large group weeklies were most likely to endorse candidates for political office could be explained by the group practice of sharing editorials. Within the Auburn Citizen newspaper group, for example, the same editorial endorsing national, state and local candidates was used by all four of the group's weeklies in the study. While large group weeklies endorsed candidates significantly more often, group weeklies did not necessarily endorse with a genuine degree of autonomy. Other newspaper groups sharing endorsements were the Geneseo Republic group, the Gibson City Courier group, and the Galya News group.

Hicks' contention that the geographic compactness of weekly newspaper groups posing a greater control of editorial opinion by ownership seems to be supported by the practice of sharing editorial endorsements.

The finding that large group weeklies endorsed candidates for political office more frequently also could be explained by the selected period of study. Endorsements should be at their highest levels during a presidential election year. The author was surprised by the number of weeklies in the study that failed to endorse a presidential candidate.

Fifty-four of the 70 weeklies sampled did not endorse any presidential candidacy, a finding similar to a trend reported in 1980 by Editor & Publisher that fewer daily newspapers were endorsing presidential candidates.¹³ A possible explanation of this reluctance to endorse was given in an editorial published by Southern Champaign County Today. The weekly said, "It may not be a great year for a presidential election, but it's not as bad as some people may believe."

Avoiding a direct endorsement was the Waterloo Republican-Times. It implied an endorsement of Reagan's candidacy with a question and answer:

"Do you want four more years of this? We don't."

A majority of the weeklies not endorsing presidential candidates played it safe by publishing duty editorials urging their readers to vote. A common theme of these editorials was expressed by the Trenton Sun:

"The Trenton Sun will not endorse anybody for any office. You're intelligent enough to vote as you please without being pressured."

Such politeness is a frail excuse for failing to make an endorsement. And editorials urging readers to vote in the general election (26 Illinois weeklies published such editorials during the study period) cannot take the place of political endorsements.

Quantity also was an unreliable indicator of editorial autonomy for the four weeklies in the sample published by the Auburn Citizen group. Those weeklies, including the Citizen, the Divernon News, the Pawnee Post, and the Chatham Clarion, published a total of 50 editorials

during the study period. Seventy percent of the editorials were written on national topics. Editorials written on local topics accounted for 24 percent of the total, and the remaining six percent was editorials written on state topics. The Citizen, with the largest circulation of the four weeklies, gave its editorials to the other three weeklies, resulting in a total of 22 original editorials and 28 reprints. Again, quantity of editorials was an unreliable indicator of editorial autonomy for the Auburn Citizen group.

The Auburn Citizen group was one of six groups represented in the study that shared editorials with its member newspapers. The other five were the Atkinson-Annawan group (Orion Times), the Virden Recorder group, the Geneseo Republic group, the Galva News group, and the small group responsible for the Gibson City Courier and the Piatt County Republican of Monticello, Ill.

Comparisons of other group owned weeklies in the sample determined that two groups did not follow the practice of sharing editorials. As noted in Chapter IV, the two weeklies in the study owned by Time magazine's Pioneer newspaper group published autonomous editorial pages. Two other weeklies under the same ownership, the Sullivan Progress and the Moultrie County News of Sullivan, Ill., also published separate editorial pages. Other newspaper groups in the study's sample were represented by only one weekly newspaper, and similar comparisons were impossible to make for these newspaper groups.

Perhaps one reason why group weeklies wrote longer editorials and published them more often is because newspaper groups hire larger editorial staffs. A 1980 survey by the American Society of Newspaper

Editors found the editorial staffs of independent daily newspapers were similar than the staffs of group owned dailies.¹⁴ If independently owned weeklies employ smaller editorial staffs, those newspapers would have less time for editorial writing. In addition, an editorial published by a one-person staff might also double a general interest column. With a limited staff, independent weeklies sometimes substitute personal opinion columns written by staff members instead of editorials.

For example, Joe Bryant, publisher of the independently owned Union Banner of Carlyle, Ill., wrote a weekly opinion column instead of editorials. Sometimes Bryant expressed the editorial positions of the Union Banner in his column, title "On/Off Target." He mixed the weekly's editorial positions with topics that did not take an editorial position, such as a column titled "Dad's Old Sow Ain't What She Used To Be." Personal opinion columns often are poor substitutes for editorials because they do not always advocate an editorial position or a plan of action. The Union Banner was excluded from the sample because Bryant's columns failed to meet the study's operational definition of an editorial.

If personal opinion columns such as "On/Off Target" had been included in the sample of 699 editorials that were examined, then the finding that group weeklies published more column inches of editorials might have been less significant. Bryant, for example, wrote at least one column weekly during the period of study.

A factor in the finding that group weeklies published editorials more frequently was the group practice of sharing editorials

and editorial pages. A distant equivalent of this practice by independent weeklies would be the publication of exchange editorials from other newspapers. With one exception, the independent weeklies in the study credited exchange editorials to their original sources. Group weeklies in the study sample failed to acknowledge that some of their editorials were used by other weeklies in the same group. The finding that editorials were published more frequently by group weeklies would have been less important had either exchange editorials been included in the sample or shared group editorials excluded from consideration.

Another explanation of the finding that group weeklies editorialized more frequently was their larger circulation. The sample of 24 large group weeklies had an average circulation of 4,495.¹⁵ The average circulation of the 21 small group weeklies was 2,722, giving the entire sample of group owned weeklies an average circulation of 3,668.¹⁶ The 25 independent weeklies in the sample averaged 3,206 in circulation.¹⁷

Independent and group weeklies in the study were similar in their choices of editorial topics. Most numerous were election-related topics. Although only 16 weeklies made endorsements of presidential candidates, the presidential election was the subject of 53 editorials. Thirty-three editorials endorsed either state or local candidates. The so-called cutback amendment to the Illinois Constitution was discussed by 40 editorials, and 10 editorials were devoted to the topic of local elections. A half-dozen editorials were written on the performance of the Carter administration, and nine pieces editorialized on Reagan's transition period.

The most popular editorial topic unrelated to the election was of the local tribute variety. Thirty-eight local tributes, ranging from commendations of the 4-H movement to the efficiency of a police drug raid, were published by the weeklies in the study. Following the local tribute editorials in order of popularity were: federal spending, 20; Christmas, 19; Thanksgiving, 15; local school spending, 15; Crime, 14; agriculture, 14; energy and oil issues, 13; National Newspaper Week, 13; inflation, 13; medical and ambulance services, 12; conservatism, 11; mass transit, 11; and road construction, 11. The nine-digit Zip Code proposed by the U.S. Postal Service was the subject of nine editorials, including editorials shared by group owned newspapers. Both group and independent weeklies were unanimous in their opposition to the proposal.

Relatively little attention was paid to the topics of ABSCAM, senior citizens, pollution, Veterans' Day, cable television, drug abuse, abortion, gun control, John Lennon's murder or a delinquent tax sale amendment on the general election ballot.

The editorial columns of Illinois weeklies were a place to explain, defend or, perhaps, to formulate editorial policy. With few exceptions, the weeklies in the study tended to take their editorial duties too seriously. Humor was an uncommon element in the sample of 699 editorials. The best humor was provided by an editorial in the St. Elmo Banner. Title "No Rest(room) for the Wicked," it addressed the problem of vandalism in a county park bathroom. Sometimes the editorial humor was unintentional, as in an editorial urging a high school to permit its students to chew tobacco. That editorial was

published by the independently owned Democrat News of Jerseyville.

Because there are no established rules for writing editorials, the editorials in the study sample ranged from superb to awful. Some of the most thought-provoking editorials were published by the independently owned St. Elmo Banner and the Pioneer group's Oak Leaves of Oak Park. At the other end of the spectrum was the highly partisan Lacon Home Journal. Most of the weeklies' editorial efforts fell somewhere between, and the entire sample taken together did a fair job of editorial writing.

In summary, the group owned weeklies wrote longer editorials, published editorials more frequently, and published more editorials on national topics than did independently owned weeklies. The independent weeklies had a stronger editorial orientation toward local editorial topics. Few weeklies in the study sample published editorials on international topics.

There was little difference in the political editorials published by the weeklies in the study sample. The political editorials of group weeklies were slightly longer than those published by independently owned weeklies. Large group weeklies were found to be more likely to endorse candidates for political office than were small group or independently owned weeklies.

After completing the research portion of the study, several suggestions for further study were almost immediate. The most provocative, in the mind of the author, was to study a similar sample of weekly newspapers during a non-election year. A result of choosing an election year in which to do this study was a sample of editorials

heavily biased toward political topics. It would be interesting to repeat the study during a non-election year to determine if the percentage of editorials written on political topics remained approximately the same.

Another suggestion for further study is to examine how editorials are placed and positioned. Is there a difference between group and independent newspapers in their placement of editorials? Does either favor front page or second page placement? Is there a difference in body type, column width, editorial headlines or by-lines? Does one type of newspaper use editorial cartoons more often than another?

The practices of sharing and exchanging editorials also should be studied. How reliant are group newspapers on shared editorials? How common is the practice of exchanging editorials among independent newspapers? And what is the effect of both practices on the newspapers' readerships?

Previous studies of editorials have compared "editorial effort" of newspapers from different eras. Such studies attempt to determine the state of editorial writing compared with the past. A possible follow-up to such studies would be a study of how cable television and video recorder technology have affected newspaper editorials. Are the electronic media setting the editorial agenda for newspapers? And if so, which newspapers are most affected?

Because newspaper groups are firmly established in American journalism, it is now possible to make long-term studies of political endorsements. What types of newspapers are most consistent in their endorsements of candidates for political office? Does a change in

ownership affect the nature of political endorsements?

Finally, what types of newspapers are most likely to generate letters to the editor with their editorials? And what types of newspapers are more tolerant of letters opposing their editorial viewpoint?

As long as newspapers are published, there will be editorials. Despite the growth of the electronic media, newspaper editorials still perform an indispensable function in a democratic society no matter who owns the press. As newspaper ownership becomes more concentrated, the need to study the effects of ownership will remain. It will remain until the time when technology finds a way to dispense with the printed word.

1 Knowlton, "The Newspaper Business," *Public Affairs*, 1931, p. 117.

2 "The Newspaper Business," *Public Affairs*, 1931, p. 117.

3 "The Newspaper Business," *Public Affairs*, 1931, p. 117.

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FOOTNOTES

¹John B. Oakes, "Concentrations of Press Power," Nieman Reports, Autumn 1978, p. 28.

²William H. Jones and Laird Anderson, "The Newspaper Business," a reprint of a 12-part series of articles published by the Washington Post beginning July 24, 1977, p. 38; Tim Schreiner, "Pressler Renews Attack on Media Chains," Sioux Falls Argus Leader, December 16, 1978, p. 1-C.

³Jones and Anderson, p. 38; Schreiner, p. 1-C.

⁴Margaret Genovese, "Hot Newspaper Market Cools Down," Presstime, May 1981, p. 7.

⁵"Scripps-Howard Endorses Reagan," Scripps-Howard News, October 1980, p. 5.

⁶D. Earl Newsom ed., The Newspaper: Everything You Need to Know to Make It in the Newspaper Business, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 242.

⁷"Groups Gain 48 in Sales of 53 Dailies in '79," Editor & Publisher, January 5, 1980, p. 28; "Forty-eight of 52 Dailies Sold in 1980 Join Group Ownership," Editor & Publisher, January 3, 1981, p. 9; "Direct Mail and Cable Companies Buy Newspapers in Slow '81 Market," Editor & Publisher, January 2, 1982, p. 36.

⁸Ronald G. Hicks, "Weekly Media Barons," Grassroots Editor, Winter 1981, p. 3.

⁹Newsom, p. 229.

¹⁰Hicks, p. 3.

¹¹"Old-Line Weeklies, Journalistic Bedrock, Are Feeling Tremors," Wall Street Journal, August 3, 1979, p. 1.

¹²Newsom, p. 229.

¹³John Consoli, "E & P Poll: Reagan backed by 443 Dailies," Editor & Publisher, November 1, 1980, p. 9.

¹⁴Jerry Walker, "ASNE Poll Finds Group Editors Have Freedom," Editor & Publisher, March 29, 1980, p. 7.

¹⁵Illinois 1982 Advertising Rate Book and Newspaper Directory, (Illinois Press Association, Springfield: 1982), pp. 2-108.

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