

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF DOCUMENT: THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF TELEVISION NEWS AT A TIME OF DEREGULATION: A CASE STUDY OF PRACTITIONERS IN THREE MAJOR MARKETS.

Kevin P. Swift, Ph.D., 2013

Directed By: Professor Emerita Maurine H. Beasley,
Philip Merrill College of Journalism
University of Maryland College Park

Broadcast news has undergone monumental changes since 1980. Longstanding rules regarding ownership and practices began to be loosened at this time, forever changing the practice of local broadcast television news. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 stimulated groundbreaking changes as rules of ownership were significantly relaxed. The result was a buying frenzy of television stations by major corporations in some places where small group and local ownership once dominated. The way broadcast news operated was changed dramatically in the years following these changes in policy.

The purpose of this research was to gain qualitative knowledge regarding the effects of changes in FCC deregulation policy on practitioners of local broadcast television news during a time of great technological change and audience fragmentation.

I examined what effects took place as a result of expanded corporate ownership and policies during this time of an already shifting landscape. To complete this research, which was conducted from 2007 to 2009, broadcast news professionals who had been in the business a minimum of fifteen years were interviewed. I interviewed a total of ten news professionals in three separate large broadcast markets, Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Baltimore, Maryland.

What I found was that broadcasters felt they had been affected negatively by the changes and were unhappy about the state of the broadcast news business. Practitioners said they were doing more with less, supervising inexperienced help, struggling with unstable work routines and working in newsrooms where morale was at an all-time low. Many experienced reporters were being told to learn how to shoot and edit their own video or quit. The practitioners also described a split in philosophy with ownership. Negative changes, said many of the practitioners, were partially the result of expanded corporate ownership, which was allowed by deregulation. While deregulation did not dictate how news should be produced it was mentioned repeatedly as one of the factors that paved the way for a period of major change in the broadcast news landscape. Other factors, such as rapidly changing technology, internet expansion and an economic downturn were also mentioned among the many changes that practitioners said they had experienced.

During the time of a shifting media landscape broadcast deregulation allowed expansion of media ownership which resulted in further changes that affected practitioners. This case study gave a voice to a sample of those practitioners and allowed them to explain the challenges it meant for them as professionals.

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MARKETS.

By:

Kevin P. Swift

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Advisory Committee:

Prof. Emerita Maurine H. Beasley, Chair, Journalism

Prof. Emerita Lee Thornton, Journalism

Assistant Prof. Kalyani Chadha, Journalism

Assistant Prof. Ronald A. Yaros, Journalism

Prof. Andrew D. Wolvin, Communication

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DEDICATION

For Kimberly

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Chapter One: Introduction: The Changing Landscape of Local Broadcast Television News

Background

“I guess one consultant told them to do this. I wish I was making this up.”
(“Ronald” 2008 interviewee)

Monica is a working woman on the go. She is Caucasian with dark brown hair and is of average appearance. She can be seen moving diligently, trendy coffee cup in hand, dropping her children off at school before she heads to her relatively high paying job. In her downtime Monica likes to shop and keep up with the latest styles. She is not wealthy but this working mother doesn't struggle either. That new Chevy or flashy handbag is not out of her reach. And she is very much looking forward to the vacation she's been planning. Monica is a very important woman. She is needed at home, well respected by her employer and has a need to know certain information: weather, traffic, school closings, trends in crime (if it might have an effect on her), and she doesn't like to miss out on the latest celebrity gossip either. Monica is a tall order. She needs to know many things, quickly, and this large market television news operation is going to make sure Monica finds out what she wants to know. No dawdling with those stories. Monica might decide it is not worth her time to stick around. Move the stories along rapidly and keep her interested while she jaunts through her day. All stories will be written with Monica in mind.

One might wonder how Monica got to be so important. America's cities are highly diverse and certainly not everyone watching the news is exactly like Monica. What is most interesting is that Monica is not a real person at all. No, Monica is a

fictitious target demographic. She is the perceived audience culmination of what one group of consultants has told a particular television news operation in this study that they should aim to please. In fact, there is a literal cardboard cutout of Monica propped up in the middle of this busy television newsroom. Surely not all of this station's viewers are exactly like Monica. However, Monica represents the type of viewer that media consultants say will help this ever expanding stable of television stations the most. Why? Because Monica has buying power. Advertisers like her and her informational needs will be met. Does she represent the whole community? No. Have the consultants entrenched themselves in the community to find out exactly what the needs of the local neighborhoods are? Not at all. Will the news workers in the newsroom have to alter their methods of putting stories together to make sure Monica watches and is not only informed by the news but entertained enough to stick around? Absolutely. "What would Monica think?" This is the news station's catch phrase and when in doubt this newsroom will think of Monica.

The story of Monica is not unusual. Many experienced practitioners of local broadcast television news tell similar stories. Deregulation has changed the way TV newsrooms operate, research, connect and ultimately deliver news to the public. As we will discuss in depth later, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 widened an already open door that allowed corporations to expand and purchase a large number of stations and operate them as any corporation would operate a chain of businesses. This expansion was allowed at a time of significant change in the broadcast news industry. Technology was changing the way news was produced and stations were battling to keep viewers from

switching the channel to any one of hundreds of cable stations. The entire landscape of broadcast news was in the midst of change.

While newsrooms everywhere have courted advertisers for decades by delivering audiences, new ownership rules have expanded that practice dramatically. Local news being formatted by non-local ownership has put local broadcast news practitioners in an odd position. As we will see, this challenge has tested nearly every aspect of their professional lives and caused some to walk away. Through this document, we will get an inside look into the challenges faced by so many who have dedicated their careers to serving the public and doing their best to keep them informed. As the landscape of ownership and management, along with technology and viewing options, began to shift dramatically in the late 1990's, so too did the way these professionals had to work through their day and ultimately rediscover how they could keep the public informed.

The Problem: What About the Practitioners?

Most research begins with an identified problem that leads to a question. That was the case in this research as well. As a young broadcast journalist working in television in the 1990's/early 2000's, I noticed a great number of changes occurring. The Federal Communications Commission was applying new rules to station owners. During these times, requirements to go digital and the monumental cost of doing so were often the topics of discussion. As ownership rules were relaxed dramatically and more rules for technical standards were put into place, major changes began to occur. The television news industry had always been a profession that proved itself on the ability to adapt to

changes. Over the years, technology had changed rapidly and broadcast journalists had progressed from being news readers drawn from print media to expert reporters with specific skill sets. Broadcast journalists had not missed a beat for decades. These changes, however, were more than technological, more than a rapid progression. They were foundational and sweeping. The very fabric of the broadcast news industry and its practices were about to be flipped over. How would the industry respond? I wanted to find out.

These changes were due, in part, to major deregulation in the world of broadcast television news between the years, 1980 and 2006.¹ The most significant of them came after major decisions by Congress, the Federal Communications Commission and President Bill Clinton in 1996² Countless studies emerged discussing the number of mergers, buyouts and purchases of stations each time ownership rules were relaxed. However, the effects resulting from those changes on the professionals who make the news were largely ignored by scholars. I set out to study those changes as a dissertation project.

In the late twentieth century individual and small group owners began to sell television stations to corporations in large numbers. Corporations had always existed in television ownership on local and national levels. However, the relaxation of the ownership limitations allowed for expansion in several different phases. Some corporations had a history in broadcast news, some did not. Changes came rapidly. Corporations immediately began laying employees off and restructuring newsrooms.

¹ Thoroughly described, chronologically, in the Context/Literature Review Chapter.

² The Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Roles changed, job titles changed, positions merged. This was very curious to a young graduate student about to leave the business for academia.³ What would the result of these massive changes be to the professionals that I worked with every day? Would they like them? Hate them? Notice no difference? Would the changing roles make broadcast news stronger? What would broadcast newsrooms look like in a few years? For better or worse, I didn't stick around to find out. Soon after the tidal wave of changes began, I left the professional world to begin teaching and conducting academic research.

As I followed the story over the next couple of years (2000-2003), I began to notice a trend. Reports resembling scoreboards of station ownership changes could be found by the hundreds. Economic reports complete with graphs and charts that offered details of media corporations and their newly acquired stations were easily found. What was not easily found, or available beyond a quick mention in magazine articles was how these changes were affecting the professionals in these newsrooms. Surely there were changes taking place. There was no way around it. The entire structure of local broadcast television news was getting a makeover and corporate owners were expanding like never before. At this point, I decided to make a major research project out of finding out just how these changes affected the professionals. I had little interest in restating the economic changes and models that had taken place. Those were all too common. My plan was to create a research project that allowed professionals to speak and explain the problems themselves. This would require a lengthy and cumbersome qualitative project. As I saw it, however, it was the only way to get at the part of the truth I was looking for.

³ I had worked in broadcast and broadcast news in many capacities and had entered graduate school with the intention of becoming a political reporter. Teaching and academia came as a surprise as I started working as a teaching assistant at Duquesne University.

While this research is framed around and took place during a time of expanded corporate ownership, allowed by new deregulatory laws, other factors must be considered in any changes that took place in local broadcast television newsrooms. The years 1996 to 2006 were a time of great technological expansion. The internet and social media, digital technology, fragmented audiences due to cable's expansion of various types of news programs and the beginning of an economic downturn, which created a great deal of uncertainty, were all factors that played into the world of local broadcast television news.

While deregulation paved the way for significant corporate expansion, all of the changes that we will see taking place cannot necessarily be directly attributed to those changes in deregulatory law made by the Federal Communications Commission. Those factors mentioned above as well as changes in advertising philosophy clearly played a role as well. With the economic downturn and need for finances due to requirements to go digital, upgrade equipment, etc., it is possible that many of the changes would have taken place even without corporate expansion. Smaller staffs, a shift toward targeting audience demographics for advertising purposes and various other cost cutting measures that caused significant change for local television broadcast professionals could very well have been part of the plan for many ownership groups regardless.

What we do know is that the time period surrounding the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was a time of great change for many reasons. Shifts in regulatory law in the midst of so much technological, financial and audience change may have sped these changes up or further complicated the situation, causing ownership to make changes that practitioners had not seen before. This study seeks to put practitioners into the

conversation about this time of a shifting media landscape and find out what they thought about how they had been affected.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

The theoretical approach taken in this study is Grounded Theory. After many discussions with the late Professor Michael Gurevitch and others at the University of Maryland regarding the theory involved with this study, I determined that I could only speculate about what theories might come from my research. Consequently, the study itself is not based, in its initial conceptualization, on any particular theory and the discovery of what emerges from the study happens as a manifestation of grounded theory.

This theory was introduced and developed in the 1960's by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Their 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, was the first major presentation of this approach. Grounded theory essentially attempts to derive theories from analyzing patterns, themes and categories through a very specific set of codes applied to in-depth interviews in a qualitative research approach (Babbie, 2002, pgs 290 and 371). Strauss and Juliet Corbin continued to research this theory and described the approach as follows, "A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (Strauss, Corbin, 1998, pg.12). This is precisely the method for discovering theory that applies to this research. Through intense analysis of in-depth

interviews, the theories involved emerge clearly and offer a clear theoretical framework for the study.

As mentioned, along with grounded theory also comes a system of analyzing data. Since this study relies on in-depth interviews, the methodology plays a big role in the discovery of theory. I use a system called “open-coding.” Strauss and Corbin describe open-coding as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (1998, Pg. 101). Along with analyzing results of my interviews and answers to questions, the open-coding system allows theories to emerge, therefore introducing grounded theory. The two commonly go hand in hand as they do in this research.

Research Questions

My overarching research question is “What was the impact of broadcast deregulation during a time of technological advancement and audience fragmentation on practitioners of broadcast television news.” This is the heart of the research. Exploration was key, which is why the research design and grounded theory are the foundation of the research. The goal was to allow the practitioners to speak and not place their answers into any kind of predetermined category. It was expected that those categories would emerge, but there were none to begin with. Below are some of the additional questions I sought to answer.

RQ1: *Are the changes positive or negative in terms of broadcast news?* The only assumption going into the research is that changes have occurred. In discussing changes

we can consider changes in technology, expanded corporate ownership and the newfound necessity to deal with a fragmenting audience.

RQ2: *How, exactly, have the structural changes affected daily routines of news professionals?* Since we know that structural changes have occurred in most newsrooms, it is important to understand if these changes are significant and to what extent they are uniform from newsroom to newsroom. Structural changes may include, but are not limited to, automated technology, shifting responsibilities for certain newsroom positions, staff sizes, smaller operating budgets and changing work routines.

RQ3: *Are views and practices of professional responsibility and autonomy intact?* I wanted to find out if the practitioners felt that they were autonomous, as professionals, to make news decisions regarding stories, coverage and the time given to those stories. Were they able to at one point? Is this still the case? How have changes affected their sense of professional responsibility, if at all? In terms of social/professional responsibility, what I was looking for was to see if the practitioners still held to the belief that broadcast journalism needs to serve the public interest and if they conducted their work accordingly. Laws have changed through deregulation that no longer require previously mandatory public service standards. Do practitioners still feel that their work needs to serve the public? Why or why not? Do management and ownership feel the same way?

RQ4: *How has morale in the newsroom been affected?* Television is a group profession. Even solo reporters (who work with no photographer or editor) still have to come back to the newsroom and work with the producer and other practitioners throughout their shift. Morale in the newsroom is extremely important to getting the daily job done and to

providing a professional and creative newsroom environment. Management often refers to the news staff as the team. With this in mind, it is extremely important to have high morale in the newsroom. If this slips, a downward cycle of occurrences is likely to affect the end product.

RQ5: *Do news professionals feel that changes have affected the quality of news they are able to deliver to the public?* It is important to discover if the practitioners themselves feel the quality is intact. Has it declined in any way? If they do not believe in their own product, a problem clearly exists. If they feel that the product has declined due to changes in ownership, an even deeper problem is likely to exist.

Definition of Terms

I have provided a list of common terminology used in this research (Appendix A). Since many news professionals were interviewed, a working understanding of the terminology is critical. This is a basic guide to the terminology used by those interviewed.

Television stations are divided into DMA rankings (**Designated Market Areas**). These are areas noted for the number of potential homes they could reach. Rankings are kept for markets ranging from #1 (New York) to #210 (Glendive, Montana). Market size is often referred to in newsroom speak. As you can see from the sample given (Appendix B), the rankings for the markets used in this research are #8 (Washington, DC), #23 (Pittsburgh, PA) and #27 (Baltimore, MD).

Need and Significance

As researchers, we seek to develop as full an understanding as possible of a certain topic or question. With that said, I recognize this research is incomplete. Several perspectives must be taken into account to truly begin to develop an understanding of the effects of deregulation during this time of fragmentation and new technology.

Quantitative studies of ownership changes and buyouts do not speak of their effects on those in the newsrooms.

Practitioners have been so left out of the conversation of deregulation and station ownership that one has to wonder if many even consider them part of the equation. This study potentially opens the door to a realization that practitioners have to be taken into consideration in the research perspective, or even in the decision making process of deregulation politics. Realistically speaking, non-academics do not tend to read or comment about traditional, academic research. Including practitioners in a study of this type could, potentially, draw them into the conversation. This will allow for further research, both qualitative and quantitative.

Finally, this research offers a response to constant criticism of the broadcast news industry. Often we see political parties (on all sides) criticize media coverage only to support changes in station ownership and practices that could potentially make news gathering and reporting significantly more difficult. Perhaps this study will shed light on the challenges faced by practitioners and allow for a fuller understanding of their roles. By giving practitioners a voice, we can offer readers a full view of the ongoing situation. In short, the study is significant, because it offers a much-needed perspective.

Researcher's Perspective

My perspective upon entering this research was only to discover the extent and impact of changes on practitioners of local broadcast television news. There is little dispute that changes occurred and continued to take place as the research progressed. My goal was to gain a human, rather than mathematical, understanding of expanded corporate ownership during this time of a changing landscape in broadcast news. Clearly, other perspectives exist. Corporate owners, private owners, management (all levels) and newcomers to the industry would have new and probably different, thoughts, experiences and stories to add. However, my interest is to study those who painstakingly produce the news on a daily basis, those who have taken on the job of broadcast journalists, perhaps as a labor of love, and have committed themselves to telling truthful stories that keep the public informed.

Full disclosure, I have worked in newsrooms that were bought out during this time period and witnessed some of the effects as they began to take hold. At WKBN in Youngstown, Ohio I was there when the station was sold by the Williamson family (who owned the station for 44 years) to GOCOM, which later became Piedmont television through a merger. Piedmont television later sold all of its holdings to a combination of larger corporations in 2007. In the short time I was with WKBN-TV after the sale to GOCOM (approximately two months), the station's news director, managing editor and several veteran practitioners were let go or bought out of their contracts. In the following year after my departure, the station slipped from number one in the market to number two for the first time in decades.

I also worked for WTAE TV in Pittsburgh, Pa from 1998 to 2001. WTAE is the only station in the Pittsburgh market to be owned by the same company, the Hearst Corporation, for its entire existence from 1958 to today. However, as deregulation took effect, Hearst was able to expand ownership. Before the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Hearst owned five television stations. It now owns 26. As Hearst expanded ownership during my time with it, I saw many changes in how the newsroom was structured and operated. A company that previously owned a small number of stations was now running things on a corporate level and the changes were happening very quickly.

Beginning this research, my initial perspective was to capture an understanding of exactly what was going on and to allow practitioners to describe the ramifications. Offering practitioners a voice, through in-depth interviews, allowed them to describe the situation through their own views and experiences. What I discovered, during the interview process, was a much deeper, more layered problem than I had ever imagined.

Chapter Two:

Review of Literature of Broadcast Regulation

The literature for broadcast regulation and deregulation in the United States can be viewed in four different areas: Historical Development, Background Expertise, Theory and Management/Economics. Several researchers have spent large portions of their careers studying these areas in great detail and their publications are well known and often cited. This review of literature concentrates on examination of those works that provide major contributions to the literature of broadcast regulation and deregulation in the United States. Many subsequent publications are cited throughout the work to fill in gaps and add context. All of the works reviewed here provided crucial information for the research and are cited throughout the document.

Historical Development

In developing a historical background of regulation and development of the FCC and its predecessor, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in the United States, I began with three of the most noted books on the topic. Each of these works is by Erik Barnouw and taken together, provide a complete history of broadcasting in the United States. The first, *A Tower in Babel* (Barnouw, 1966), offers a thorough history of the beginning of broadcasting and its start in America. The work provides important understanding of and historical context for the creation of radio broadcasting in its earliest stages, from the invention of the initial devices to the fight for frequency space, which caused the

government to take action. Barnouw provides the history of the birth of the Federal Radio Commission, the reasons behind it and the initial intentions of the group. This particular work concludes with the creation of the networks and earliest Radio Acts, which set the laws into motion for regulation of the airspace on the radio dial.

The second book of this series is titled *The Golden Web* (Barnouw, 1968). This work gives us a thorough history of broadcasting from 1933 to 1953. Barnouw tells the story of the Communications Act of 1934, which changed the Federal Radio Commission to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the sweeping new powers that came with it. Barnouw offers details of the new challenges with radio by narrating the story of a young man named Farnsworth who was working on a design patent for something called television. Important historical context is developed in this work as the elements and purposes of regulation began to take hold through World War II and the development of television in the United States.

Barnouw concludes his trilogy with *The Image Empire* (Barnouw, 1970). This work follows the history of broadcasting from 1953 until 1969. Barnouw explains the rise of the television networks and further expansion of laws surrounding the airwaves. Most important to this study is Barnouw's explanation of the reasons behind the laws that became FCC regulations in the United States. For developing an understanding of context and the history of regulation/deregulation, Barnouw's works are critical on many levels.

Further adding to the historical context of broadcasting and early regulation is *Broadcasting in America* by Sydney Head (Head, 1972). The author offers historical context in a much different way than Barnouw in that he breaks down broadcasting into areas of history, economics, social control and influence. Head allows the reader to

understand many of the decisions that went into making regulatory laws and their perceived effects. A significant amount of attention is paid to questions surrounding public interest and alternative views are given of battles that were waged during the regulatory process.

Background Expertise

Several authors have written on broadcasting in the United States as we have moved from the regulatory era through deregulation. Douglas Gomery has authored several books and articles of this type. *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Gomery, 2008) offers a full history of the subject. Gomery continues with a contemporary view of the situation, which includes a look at the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Gomery adds market analysis to his history of the laws and changes that took place, giving the book an economic spectrum as well as a modern historical view.

I also consulted two works of David Croteau and William Hoynes. In terms of background expertise, *Media and Society* (Croteau, Hoynes, 2003) provides an excellent look at the importance of media (broadcast and other) in American society and how changes in ownership have affected the media industry. The Fairness Doctrine, ownership cost-cutting and the Telecommunications Act of 1996 are studied in-depth. The work concludes with reference to globalization. It is most useful for understanding how changes came about and exactly what rules were in place at a particular time. The authors' second book is discussed below.

There are few authors who speak with as much authority on the issue of broadcast regulation/deregulation as Robert McChesney. McChesney's work provides significant depth and context for understanding changing rules and laws. I first reviewed *The Problem of Media* (McChesney, 2004). Here, the author looks at content and the system in place that creates content. Clear explanation is provided regarding how media markets work and the problems associated with a profit-driven media.

Moving beyond the typical history of when laws were passed and put in place, McChesney highlights the areas of concern for journalism and how laws in place are affecting media/broadcast negatively. I was particularly interested in the author's textual discussion of media ownership policies and the real effects of these laws. McChesney analyzes monopolies and ongoing issues in media ownership from the standpoint of one who does not support deregulation.

Mara Einstein looks at regulation and deregulation laws from the standpoint of their effects on diversity in media. In doing this, Einstein provides a thorough analysis of the regulatory process and economic changes. Einstein's book *Media Diversity* (Einstein, 2004) provides outstanding information on the history of regulation, deregulation and their economic impacts as they affect diversity in media.

A thorough history of regulation and deregulation is also examined by Alec Foege (Foege, 2008). Foege analyzes history from the early stages of radio through the rise of the Clear Channel network as a force in the industry. This author's work is important in understanding deregulation from the standpoint of the radio industry.

Theory

Three major works were helpful to me in gaining the understanding of media theory. Denis McQuail's thorough text, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (McQuail, 2000), provides an explanation of the public sphere and its history. I consulted McQuail largely for his writing on the public sphere model. McQuail further provided useful guidance for understanding social responsibility theory.

John McManus very clearly outlined the market media model in his book *Market Driven Journalism* (McManus, 1994). McManus takes the reader through the rise of market driven journalism, changes in news and how a market driven system affects news production. For this work, I focused mainly on McManus's explanation of market theory and products. This work provided a good outline for explanation of the market theory model and provided balance to McQuail's work on the public sphere model.

Croteau and Hoynes' *The Business of Media* (Croteau, Hoynes, 2006) was useful in more than one area. In terms of theory, the authors begin the book by offering significant detail on both the market and the public sphere models. The work gives a balanced view of how our media is different from media in other countries and includes our tradition of civic responsibility.

In *Mediating the Message*, (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996). Pamela Reese and Stephen Shoemaker thoroughly discuss various influences on the mass media. While all chapters are interesting and add to one's broad knowledge of media influence, it was the organizational influences chapter that I consulted the most. Shoemaker and Reese carefully outline goals of media organization and their roles and structures. This work

was instrumental in allowing me to understand the theory of Hierarchy of Influences in the broadcast media structure.

Business and Economics

Croteau and Hoynes are also very helpful in this area. Moving from theory to economics, the authors provide a complete analysis of corporate strategy and media conglomerates. The authors also look into business strategies and how they shape media content and society. I found most useful (in both books) the manner in which the authors approach their explanation of the topics. They offer insight into the real challenges faced by the business of broadcast news. In this vein, the book ends with a discussion of regulatory policy and public interest.

Benjamin Compaine and Douglas Gomery offer thorough and competing views on media competition and concentration (Compaine, Gomery, 2000). Gomery details the changes brought about by deregulation and the changing TV landscape. He also describes the manner in which the business has remained the same in certain aspects, despite major changes. Most useful was Gomery's explanation of the differences between old network strategies compared to new ones. He further examines the system that allows oligopolies to form and their effects on the media system in America. Compaine offers a different perspective in that he views the media in a more collective, macro manner with the broadcast industry serving as one small part of a working system. He reviews ownership patterns and trends from a market model perspective. The real value of this reading is the understanding gained by viewing both perspectives and learning the arguments made on

both sides of the media ownership debate. While the two authors do not debate one another directly, they do offer competing viewpoints on many issues, providing the reader with a broad background.

Media Management (Albarran, 1997) also provides a look into management and economic structures of the changing media markets. Albarran focuses on the changing world of electronic media management. This perspective is very valuable in providing an understanding of the strategies involved in management, control of personnel, and most importantly, working with regulatory influences.

Another McChesney book titled *The Political Economy of Media* (McChesney, 2008) was very helpful on many fronts. While offering an updated view of media deregulation, McChesney refers to some of the major players in the media industry who were mentioned in my interviews. I found the author's thesis on media deregulation most useful, especially in gaining an understanding of the lack of knowledge about the situation among the public and even lawmakers themselves. McChesney offers interesting perspectives into the changing laws regarding regulation/deregulation and shows how these laws differ from those put into place by the original FCC decisions.

The Existing Literature

Based on the review of literature, it is clear that two areas of literature exist and one is missing. The first that exists, in abundance, is the history of regulation and deregulation in the United States. As deregulation began, this already healthy bank of publications grew in size to put the changing face of the industry into perspective. It is

important to understand this history and the growth of that existing literature has aided tremendously in the organization of this research. It is for this reason that I decided to pursue the entire review of literature in the style of a history of the FRC/FCC and regulatory actions.

The second area that exists in the literature concerns factual findings and economic studies. Countless articles and publications exist telling us how many companies own stations, who are currently making purchases, what their ad revenues are, etc. A large number of quantitative studies are available in libraries and on websites to assist us in understanding who owns what. At the start of this study, these articles and book publications showed a great deal of fascination with the shifting grounds of media ownership and changing tides of how business was done.

What is clearly and almost completely missing from the literature is how all of these changes have affected practitioners of local broadcast television news. Only cursory (and often misleading) mentions of newsroom staff sizes and salaries are mentioned. As a journalist, discovery in this area is something I find very important. What I hope to contribute with this research is a very direct and literal view of how these massive shifts in ownership, at a time of audience fragmentation and new technology, have changed life in the newsroom for practitioners who have been in the business long enough to know the difference between current and former practices. Through this study, I hope to begin to fill in the gaps generally left out the existing literature.

The History of Broadcast Regulation in the United States

It is impossible to fully analyze the effects of broadcast deregulation without developing a thorough understanding of regulatory laws and the process by which those laws and regulations were put into place. Only then can we begin to understand the sweeping changes brought about by deregulation. A complete history of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) would constitute a vast research project itself and is beyond the scope of this project.⁴ For purposes of this study, however, an analysis of important dates, acts and decisions spanning the history of the Commission will be examined. This study examines the power invested in the commission by Congress in respect to the reasoning behind the commission's decision to regulate and later deregulate the broadcast industry. This background will provide a basis for understanding the potentially far reaching effects of broadcast deregulation.

Simple Beginnings

“S.S. *Titanic* ran into iceberg. Sinking Fast” (Barnouw, 1975, pg.17). This was the faint distress signal picked up by a young Marconi operator named David Sarnoff on April, 14, 1912.⁵ Sarnoff, through his Marconi device, was able to alert other ships in the area to the iceberg threat and assist in notifying the press and anxious family members of

⁴ Formerly the Federal Radio Commission until 1934.

⁵ A “Marconi” was an early system of long-distance wireless communication created by Guglielmo Marconi. Mainly used for ship-to-ship contact.

the names of survivors. At the time, all ships were not required to carry wireless communications systems. It is commonly believed that the sinking could have been avoided entirely through the use of ship-to-ship communication that would have alerted the crew to the icebergs in the area. The Marconi device, created by Guglielmo Marconi and initially called the “Black Box,” was a wireless device that transmitted voices. With radio as we know it not coming into play until years later, this was groundbreaking technology. Many other wireless operators took to the air with similar, cheaper, and sometimes illegal systems, but Marconi’s wireless transmissions were stronger and more organized. The system was utilized by the Marconi Company by placing a member of its staff in a location, such as a ship, from which messages could be communicated to a central location or other wireless operators in the area.⁶ Due to chaos on the airwaves caused by a lack of enforced wireless regulation, it was Sarnoff’s Marconi device that served as the only successful instrument for seeking assistance. (Barnouw, 1966).

The U.S. Government, which only had minimal laws regarding the many forms of radio at the time,⁷ decided to create a set of laws and regulations for wireless transmitting. The result was the Radio Act of 1912. In the new legislation the U.S. Congress cleared up several issues facing “voice” transmitters of the time. Aside from the issue of maritime communication, a battle between military and amateur users was causing significant chaos:

⁶ The Titanic had two Marconi operators onboard who transmitted to Sarnoff.

⁷ Given names at the time such as “wireless telephone,” radio telephone,” radiophone,” and “radio” (Barnouw, pg.12).

On the eve of World War I, the air was a chaos of crackling codes, voices and music. Much of the transmission was army and navy communication. Another large part was contributed by the irrepressible amateurs, already numbering in the thousands, who were anathema to the military; their chatter was said to interfere with military communication. They were even accused of sending fake orders to navy ships, purportedly from admirals (Barnouw, Pg. 17).

The Act had three main components. First, it established government control of the airwaves through the issuing of licenses. Second, the broadcast spectrum was allocated based on what the government considered priority of uses. Third, individual communications, such as distress calls, were given priority over amateur communications (Einstein, 2004). In addition, all ships were required to carry wireless communications systems. This regulation would now be under the office of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor.

The new laws were simple, straightforward and carried a clear message, chaos would not be permitted. The Secretary, through the directives of Congress and President William Howard Taft, would see to it that the airwaves were well organized and not misused. This was a role that all involved would soon realize was a very heavy burden.

A Commission is Formed

By the 1920's the airwaves were jammed with stations competing for frequency space. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover assigned frequencies and times of

operation to all stations with properly applied for licenses. However, frequency space grew scarce and some stations were forced to share air time with others. The ensuing chaos soon led to major changes.

WJAZ, operating out of Chicago, was required to share space with a Denver station. However, the Chicago station did not follow the proper guidelines regarding times of operation and frequency. The station purposely violated the rules set down by the Commerce Secretary by broadcasting on a vacant frequency allotted for Canada (Foege, 2008). Secretary Herbert Hoover, in turn, filed suit against the station for violating the Radio Act of 1912. In a decision that surprised many, the court ruled in favor of the defendant in the case, citing that the 1912 Act was inadequate in giving power to the Secretary of Commerce due to a lack of tests or standards which would control his discretion.⁸ In short, Hoover's powers were not clearly defined by congress and he had overstepped his authority in making such decisions (Head, 1972).

Congress responded with new legislation known as the Radio Act of 1927. This resulted in the creation of an independent agency designed to oversee all aspects of radio. The agency became known as the Federal Radio Commission. The commission consisted of five members, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate (Krasnow and Longley, 1978). Initially, the FRC was to be a temporary agency functioning for a period of one year, but a large workload and a never-ending list of hearings led Congress to renew the agency the following year and again in 1929, this time indefinitely.

⁸ The position of Secretary of Commerce and Labor had been separated into two offices by this time.

The commission, through very specific language in the new laws, granted station licenses, assigned frequency space, allotted airtimes, and enforced several new rules based on the philosophy of the new radio act. This philosophy stated that the airwaves belonged to the public.

Some members of Congress feared that private property rights could lead to the establishment of a commercialized system of broadcasting. “Many members of Congress still believed strongly that the spectrum was a special resource that the public should continue to own because of its unique role in conveying information and molding opinion” (Slotten, 2000, pg. 40). Therefore any new legislation was expected to include public interest standards which would be strictly enforced. Licenses were granted for a period of three years. At the end of that period, each station was required to prove that it was committed to serving the public. As Barnouw explains, “in the granting of a license or transfer of a station, the guiding standard was to be the *public interest, convenience or necessity*” (1966, pg. 196). This standard would become known as the PICON principle.

One part of the Radio Act that did not have vague language was designed to oppose monopolies. It set forth that a major responsibility of the FRC and the 1927 act was to see to it that monopolies did not take hold in any way. One clause read that the Commission was forbidden to grant a license to:

Any person, firm, company, or corporation, or any subsidiary thereof, which has been finally adjudged guilty by a Federal Court of unlawfully monopolizing or attempting unlawfully to monopolize, after this Act takes effect, radio communication, directly or indirectly, through the control of the manufacture or sale of radio apparatus, through exclusive traffic arrangements, or by any

other means, or to have been using unfair methods of competition (Barnouw, 1990, pg. 60).

The rise of network broadcasting and a decrease of non-profit broadcasters became a major concern of the commission. Senator C.C. Dill (Democrat-Washington) commented that “the great feeling about radio in this country, is that it will be monopolized by the few wealthy interests” (McChesney, 2008, pg. 160).⁹ This concern led to protection of nonprofit broadcasters from the networks and eventually to spectrum reallocation to insure fairness.

The regulatory desires of Congress proved a tall order as the world of broadcasting exploded with activity and interest. Barnouw explained that talk of chain broadcasting was rampant throughout the industry, but it did not even receive a mention in the original language that created the 1927 Act. Only at the final moment was the subject squeezed into law with a single sentence. Public Law No. 692, 69th Congress, Sec 4 states that the commission is authorized to make “special regulations applicable to radio stations engaged in chain broadcasting” (1966, pg. 199). The world of broadcasting would soon be dominated by chain broadcasting. For its part, the commission could only use the power invested in it by this single sentence to deal with the domination issue.

To further make the point that the 1927 Act might be obsolete at its inception, Barnouw pointed to a single word in the language that defined the term radio in the new law. That word was “picture”. Radio was defined as “any intelligence, message, signal, power, picture, or communication of any nature transferred by electrical energy from one

⁹ Dill would become known as the “father of the Radio Act.”

point to another without the aid of any wire connecting the points” (1990). This language is interesting to say the least. It certainly can be inferred that the Radio Act was intended to include television. Nevertheless, the issues and need for legislation to regulate television could not possibly have been foreseen in those early stages. As had been the case with radio, however, the changing media landscape required new laws, and soon a new act.

A New Act-A New Commission

As pressure mounted in the early 1930’s for clarity in regulation, so too did suggestions for a consolidated commission that would oversee wireless and wire communication. It was not until 1934, however, that action was taken on this front. President Roosevelt issued a statement to Congress which read, in part:

I have long felt that for the sake of clarity and effectiveness, the relationship of the Federal Government to certain services known as utilities should be divided into three fields: Transportation, power and communications. The problems of transportation are vested in the Interstate Commerce Commission, and the problems of power... in the Federal Power Commission. In the field of communications, however, there is today no single Government agency charged with broad authority (Head, Pg. 163, 1972).

It was this suggestion that would eventually bring about the Communications Act of 1934. The Act essentially reinstated the laws from the 1927 Act, with several additions. The commission would now be in charge of radio, cable, telephone and telegraph communication. With this additional responsibility came a larger commission,

now seven members instead of the FRC's five. Bipartisanship was still required. Not more than four members of the commission could be from the same political party. Furthermore, the committee would now be known as the Federal Communications Commission, a name that more adequately defined the commission's responsibilities. Despite its increased oversight, the commission's primary power remained in the ability to grant broadcast licenses and renewals and to assess fines for noncompliance. The 1934 Act continued to specify that broadcasters were required to serve the "public interest, convenience, or necessity" (Einstein, Pg. 11).

The coverage of the new Communications Act characterized it as a New Deal bill, calling it a "New Deal in Radio Law" that was aimed at "curbing monopoly control in radio" (McChesney, 2008, pg. 177). However, since nearly all of the legal language in the Act came from the previous administration, Roosevelt can only be credited with following suit. As Foege explains, Roosevelt's reasons for support were obvious. The majority of newspapers in America were against him in his campaign for the Presidency. Radio offered a chance for him to speak directly to the American public through what became known as his fireside chats. Based on that success, it would not be long before many government agencies began producing content for radio (pg. 90).

The rules set in place in the 1934 Act would remain largely unchanged and be the backbone for regulation for over 40 years. Few changes were made as the commission served largely to enforce the laws and philosophy of serving the public. Over the next several decades attempts were made by Congress to amend the Act. Few actually became

law and among those that did, the majority concerned administration and technology (Head, pg. 163).¹⁰

The steadfast adherence to anti-monopoly and public service led to a major shift for one of radio's biggest networks. FCC rules forbade any network to affiliate with more than one station in a community. NBC (National Broadcasting Company) began operating on a two tier system in 1927 called the "Red" and the "Blue" networks. In NBC's eyes, this allowed it to broadcast on two separate stations that competed with each other. Since this "competition" was actually only internal, the FCC ruled in 1939 that NBC would have to do away with, or sell off, one of its networks entirely. NBC appealed the ruling and lost. Thus, NBC "Red" remained as NBC and NBC "Blue" was sold and became the American Broadcasting Company, otherwise known as ABC (Head, 1972).

Status Quo

By 1939 television was a topic of heavy conversation. RCA President David Sarnoff became a member of the planning committee for the New York World's Fair and had ideas for the debut of commercial television, broadcasting on a regular schedule, at the fair itself (Barnouw, 1968). This formal event took place on April, 30th 1939 with a television appearance by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹¹ The remainder of the programming was largely entertainment and demonstration of broadcasting ability.

¹⁰ One exception being the establishment of the Public Broadcasting Corporation in 1968.

¹¹ Trial runs were completed before the official debut.

Despite the attention and excitement, television sets were expensive by standards¹² of the times and the public was not quick to purchase them.

For its part, the FCC had made few decisions about television. Since the 1934 Act was based almost entirely on the provisions of the 1927 Radio Act, there was little acknowledgement of television's existence. It was not until 1940 that the FCC, forced by growing competition among RCA, CBS and others, made a decision on commercial television broadcasting. The FCC decided to allow limited commercial operations on stations that were committed to programming experimentation. The commission also stressed, however, that "emphasis on the commercial aspects of the operation at the expense of program research is to be avoided" (Slotten, pg. 93). This experimental phase did not last long. Concerns over technical standards led the FCC to suspend commercial television broadcasting later that year before finally agreeing to FULL commercial operation in 1941.

Commercial broadcasting was put aside with the onset of World War II in December 1941. The FCC decided to use the war period to discover and better understand television technology and what laws should apply. Radio flourished during this time with war reports and varied programming. Still, experimenting and technological advancement of television continued.

Within three years of the end of WWII in 1945, nearly all of the television licenses that could be given under the existing allocation scheme had been issued and the demand for more intensified (Deluca, 1980). This problem led the FCC to freeze the issuance of licenses for the next four years. The result left the three dominant radio

¹² Prices ranged from \$199.50 to \$600.00 (Barnouw, 1968, pg. 126).

networks (NBC, ABC and CBS), in the driver's seat since they had been the quickest to pounce on TV licenses.

While appearing to be confused by license issuance and technology surrounding television, the FCC was steadfast in maintaining its insistence on serving the public interest. In March of 1946 the commission issued a memorandum simply titled *Public Service Responsibilities of Broadcast Licensees*. This would be forever known as the "Blue Book" (Baughman, 1985). In the report, the FCC listed what it considered the five distinctive and outstanding functions of the sustaining (non-sponsored) program:

1. To secure for the station or network a means by which in the over-all structure of its program service, it can achieve a *balanced* interpretation of public needs.

2. To provide programs which by their very nature may not be sponsored with propriety.

3. To provide programs for significant minority tastes and interests.

4. To provide programs devoted to the needs and purposes of non-profit organizations.

5. To provide a field for experiment in new types of programs, secure from the restrictions that obtain with reference to programs in which the advertiser's interest in selling goods predominates

(Lichty, Topping, 1975, pg. 531).

Furthermore, the commission called on stations to present additional local programming, stating news and public affairs programming should be aired whether popular or not (Baughman, 1985). These viewpoints represented suggestions rather than hard and fast requirements. However, the license renewal process provided a thorough investigation of

a station's activities and many feared that the new "Blue Book" rules would lead to crippling oversight of daily programming.

While fears of strict control of daily programming proved to be unfounded, the FCC did make a decision that would have long-lasting effects for decades to come. In 1949 the commission repealed a prior ban on broadcast editorials and installed the Fairness Doctrine.¹³ The goal of the doctrine was to "promote serious coverage of public issues and to ensure diversity by preventing any single viewpoint from dominating coverage" (Croteau, Hoynes, 2003, pg, 99). For their part broadcasters were required to devote a reasonable amount of time to issues of interest and concern for their given communities. They were also required to see to it that opposing viewpoints were offered in regard to these issues. This required a great deal of work and was not popular. Challenges to the doctrine's legality and usefulness were defeated for years, however, and the practices of the law continued. The commission did not interfere with programming on a show by show basis. As explained, stations did not have to split a show's content down the middle. For example, conservative talk shows were not removed from the air, but the station airing a conservative show would, in turn, have to offer other programming that included different points of view (Croteau, Hoynes, 2003). Furthermore, investigations of a station's content only took place after the FCC received a complaint.

One of the broadcasting industry's responses to this requirement was the introduction of television news. Many local television stations began news programming.

¹³ Set in place in 1941 after a case involving Boston radio station WAAB. Testimony stated that the station aired editorials disparaging local politicians without grounds (Foegen, pg, 90).

This was seen as an easy and efficient method of meeting public service and equal time requirements. Many shows used a “rip and read” format with one announcer reading the headlines from the Associated Press radio wire. Many of these shows lasted only a few minutes, and until the 1960’s, the longest television news shows were only fifteen minutes in length (Kaniss, 1991).

It was in the late 1940’s that television sets declined in price to become affordable and began to enter homes in large numbers. In the Christmas shopping season of 1948 a 12-inch table model television retailed at less than \$100 (Gomery, 2008). This newly-affordable price, along with the availability of installment payment plans, put televisions in homes across America. Between 1948 and 1958 the number of homes with TV receivers in America climbed from 172,000 to 42 million (Baughman, 1985). Television’s popularity exploded with popular entertainment shows leading the way. News programming would not be far behind.

Station ownership and cross ownership of radio and television stations were largely restricted. In efforts to promote diversity, public service and the resistance of monopolies, the FCC limited multiple ownership. This brought about what came to be known as the seven, seven, and seven rule in 1954. Limits were set at seven AM, seven FM and seven television stations per single ownership. Furthermore, a limit of one television station per market was put into place and a “trafficking” rule that required an owner to hold a license for a minimum of three years was also activated (Head, Sterling, Schofeld, 1994). These standards were in place for the next 30 years and challenges to them were quickly put down.

The major networks gained popularity with news programming such as “See It Now” with Edward R. Murrow in the 1950’s and Don Hewitt’s “60 Minutes” in the 1960’s. These programs captivated the American audience with their newsmagazine format but offered little for local interests. However, in the late 1960’s station managers began to see opportunities in local news. Advertising revenues earned during network programming remained largely in the hands of the networks, but earnings from local programming could be kept in full. Since news production was cheap by comparison to entertainment programming, this left the door wide open for an expansion of local news coverage (Kaniss, 1991). Local affiliates began expanding coverage of news and increasing programming. Advertisers could target very specific demographics by airing commercials in local markets. This symbiosis caught on quickly and the popularity of local television news, with pictures matching words and coverage tuned in specifically to local interests, exploded throughout cities in America. As the popularity of local television news made ownership profitable even though the FCC held steadfast to limited ownership rules, an array of station ownership began to grow.

Throughout the 1970’s local television news grew steadily in popularity. Videotape made shooting stories more convenient and significantly cheaper than the use of film. Advertisers found their markets. Many journalists moved from radio or newspaper to television with the shifting tide and became fixtures in local markets. This seemed to be a recipe for success on all fronts. The late 1970’s, however, brought protests and the FCC began to listen. Change appeared to be in the wind.

Chapter Three:
Context for The Decision to Deregulate:

The requests to start the process of removing some of the 60-year-old laws regulating broadcasting began to gain momentum in the early 1970's. However, what has become known as "deregulation" in the 21st century was clearly not the intention of those initially seeking change. What many involved with the broadcasting industry wanted was alteration of a handful of rules thought to be limiting the freedom of broadcasters.¹⁴ The television industry began lobbying Congress for these changes during the Nixon administration. Attorney Victor Ferrall described the early discussions as follows:

A process of regulatory pruning, variously styled 'reregulation,' 'un-regulation,' and deregulation,' was begun by the FCC during the Nixon years and continued under Presidents Ford and Carter. The essential underpinnings of regulation, however, that free broadcasting, particularly local broadcasting, is vital to the public interest, that station licenses are public trustees of the publicly-owned airwaves, and that continued realization of a broadcasting service responsive to public needs requires continuing federal government scrutiny – were not challenged (McManus, 1994, Pg. 53).

Regardless of the requests and proposals advanced, it would not be until the early 1980's that any real change occurred. At the heart of change in FCC policy was a growing

¹⁴ Mainly ascertainment laws, the Fairness Doctrine, advertising rules and program guidelines.

debate centered around the traditional public sphere model of broadcasting and the market-driven model.

Two Schools of Thought

Opposing perspectives were at the heart of the debate about broadcast regulation in the United States; the public sphere model and the market model. While vastly different, both philosophies claimed to do what the FCC had been insisting upon for decades, serving the public interest. However, as broadcast news began to grow and more stations began to surface, the debate over the most effective system began to heat up. As we will see, with the changing of political administrations along with FCC commissioners and chairs, this debate became a hot topic.

The Public Sphere

Until the early 1980's television news had been regulated under the public sphere model. This model, which famously was studied and theorized by Jurgen Habermas, sees a public sphere as a place where the public can exchange views, ideas and opinions in order to form public opinion. The public sphere actually exists when citizens gather to discuss issues of the day and form public opinion (Dahlgren, 1995). Much of Habermas's work was theorized before the rise of television and may seem unrelated to local broadcast television news, but that is untrue. In the public sphere model, people are viewed as citizens (as opposed to consumers) and it is the responsibility of all media to

serve these citizens. Ownership and control of outlets should be broad and diversified and citizens should sometimes have access to media outlets in order to communicate with each other (Croteau/Hoynes, 2006).

Where the concept of the public sphere came into play with FCC regulation was clearly in the public interest requirements set into law by the commission. The job of television outlets, especially news outlets, was seen as promoting citizenship through a diversity of programming and ideas, especially those political in nature. Through regulation, public opinion and discourse were protected through laws that required balance and diversity in programming and the presentation of ideas.¹⁵ Success then was measured in the ability of the station to serve the public and keep citizens who are active in society able to make informed decisions. This “space” was thought to be an extremely important element in a living, breathing democracy. For this reason the media were seen as a vital part of society and not viewed solely as a commodity. In short “the media, when organized in an appropriate way, especially when open, free and diverse, could be considered one of the most important intermediary institutions of the civil society” (McQuail, 2000, pg. 158).

Critics of the public sphere model often argue that it is “idealistic and of a bygone era” (McQuail, pg. 158, 2000). Their argument is that its concepts do not apply to media outlets in modern society and perhaps never did apply directly. Furthermore, critics argue that the current landscape of today’s media, with many more options available to the consumer than previously, changes the concept of what can be seen as a diversity of

¹⁵ The Fairness Doctrine was thought to play a major role in ensuring this.

information. Therefore, they contend the model of the public sphere needs to be reconsidered.

The Market Model

The market model views the public as consumers and media outlets like other consumer products. The concept is that as long as competition exists the public itself will decide what media outlets (in this case television stations) should air for public viewing. Regulation is considered inhibiting and largely unnecessary, while the ruling authority is supposed to be seen as supply and demand (Croteau/Hoynes, 2006). Theoretically speaking, consumers give their allegiance to the media outlet providing the highest quality news, thus creating a system by which the public decides which outlets best serve its interests and receives all of the advantages of the public sphere through competition of outlets in the open market (McManus, 1994).

John McManus further outlines the concepts behind market driven journalism by outlining the basic principles of market theory and products:

1. *Quality and value are defined by consumers, rather than producers or government.*
2. *Responsiveness to consumers:* Sales depend on consumer demand. Producers of products will be rewarded and spurned by consumers based on quality and necessity of products.
3. *Self correction:* If the market doesn't offer what the consumer wants, new products will enter it.

4. *Constant motivation to excel*: Producers compete with each other to meet consumers' needs and desires; therefore, there is constant pressure to produce new and improved goods.
5. *Efficient allocation of society's resources*: Producers of what consumers most value will gain more of society's scarce resources as their products sell.
6. *Freedom of choice*: Consumers are free to pick among products offered. There is no coercion to buy one over the other. (1994, pg. 4-5).

To supporters of the market model of journalism, these characteristics of the market make it a superior system that should be applied to media outlets. In short, free up the markets and let the public decide.

The market model also has many critics. Their arguments largely revolve around the fact that they do not agree on rules and concepts of the open market applying to the media industry. Croteau and Hoynes outline three of the main points that critics of the market model say make it inappropriate:

1. Advertising needs to be taken into account. Unique market relationships are developed through the mass media. In some respects the media are not responsive to audiences.
2. Media cannot be considered merely as products. Media are resources for citizens with important informational, educational and integrative functions.
3. The unique role that media play in a democracy is reflected in the legal protections the media enjoy in the United States. Thus, the First Amendment gives the media special protection because of its important role to society (pg. 27-31, 2006).

Critics further argue that large corporate ownership groups who follow the market model take a completely different philosophy toward advertising in newsrooms. Rather than gaining advertising by providing the best local news for a community, the station actually creates newscasts centered on a target market demographic so that the station can sell advertising to companies also targeting that demographic. An example of this concept was given at the beginning of this study (Monica) and we will hear additional comments regarding this change in advertising and marketing philosophy in the interviews sections. Those who commented say that this idea took off after ownership groups were allowed further expansion.

For their part, ownership groups might argue that fragmentation of the audience makes this type of philosophy necessary in order to maintain viewers. Therefore, they market and advertise to those most likely to watch in each of the (sometimes many) markets where they own stations. One critic of this argument is none other than Ted Turner, a former cable news owner himself:

The "competitive presence of cable" is a mirage. Broadcast networks have for years pointed to their loss of prime-time viewers to cable networks--but they are losing viewers to cable networks that they themselves own. Ninety percent of the top 50 cable TV stations are owned by the same parent companies that own the broadcast networks. The media giants are getting a deal from Congress and the FCC because their broadcast networks are losing share to their own cable networks. It's a scam (Turner, Washington Monthly, July/August 2004).

Whether or not this type of “deal” that Turner refers to extends to owners of local television stations is debatable. Regardless, owners, who follow the market model, and other owners and practitioners, who might follow the public service model, have clearly differing viewpoints on advertising and marketing and those viewpoints have a direct affect on news content.

A Toaster with Pictures

Under the Ronald Reagan administration, Mark Fowler became Chairman of the FCC in 1981. Fowler, whose ideologies fell directly in line with Reagan’s plans to deregulate many industries through the market model, successfully began the process of what we now know as deregulation. Fowler rejected the public service model of the FCC put in place by the Communications Act of 1934. The new chairman took the approach that market forces better determine the needs of the audience rather than a governing body deciding what is in its best interest (Baran, 2002). “To call Mark Fowler a staunch supporter of deregulation is to underplay just how passionate he was about this ideology” (Einstein, 2004, pg. 69). In fact, Fowler has been mentioned over the years for his famous “toaster” comment. To be specific, the remark was made during a notable speech when Fowler explained, “television is just another appliance. It is a toaster with pictures” (Croteau/Hoynes, 2006, pg. 27). With Fowler in charge of the FCC, the slow progression toward a deregulated media industry could begin.

Among the first rules to change were *Community Ascertainment Requirements*. This law required broadcasters to gather opinions from community leaders about what the

local community needed and what they thought would help them to best serve the community. Without doing so, local stations could not earn a license renewal (Owen, Wildman, 1992). This was seen as a tedious and unnecessary process by broadcasters and most welcomed the removal of the requirement (Albarran, 1997).

A major change to the structure of the FCC came in 1981. Ronald Reagan and Fowler, seeking to fill an open FCC commissioner's seat, announced that they planned to name Stephen Sharp to the commission. Several Senate members opposed the decision claiming that the seat had been promised to someone else. Fowler and Reagan won out and Sharp was appointed to the Commission. At the same time the FCC was reduced from seven to five members, each of whom would serve five year terms (Sterling, Kitross, 1990).¹⁶ Appointments still were by the President and no more than two Commissioners allowed from either political party. The Chairman continued to be the President's choice.

A decision that would have strong implications in years to come was a tentative agreement on the abolishment of the "Fin-Syn" (financial interest and syndication rules) put into place in 1970 to prevent television networks from having a financial interest in the programs they broadcast or making any kind of profit via syndication (Albarran, 1997). The goal, according to the FCC was "to limit network control over television programming and thereby encourage the development of a diversity of programs through diverse sources of program services" (Croteau, Hoynes, pg.85, 2006).

¹⁶ It had been five originally during the FRC days, but had been increased to seven with expansion of the FRC to the FCC.

The FCC tentatively agreed to do away with these rules because of increased competition in the marketplace and new technologies such as cable and direct broadcast satellites.¹⁷ Rather than abolish the Fin-Syn rules immediately, amendments were made so that financial interest and syndication rules were allowed to expire in 1995. As we will see later, this would lead to more deregulation.

Under Fowler, the FCC also eliminated programming quotas for news and public affairs. Previously stations were required to offer news and public affairs programming as part of their commitment to serving the public interest (Albarran, 1997). The requirements were that stations devote five percent of their overall programming to news and public affairs and ten percent overall to non-entertainment programming, which included news. This change put broadcast newsrooms closer in operation to the First Amendment freedom of newspapers, something they had been seeking for years (McManus, 1994). The new law also gave new stations the option of not airing news at all.

Many of these changes were welcomed by broadcasters and seen as necessary to keep up with the times. What broadcasters did not ask for or expect was the end of quotas in ownership policy put forth by the Fowler-led FCC. Until 1985 the rule regarding ownership had been known as the seven-seven-seven rule. This had been the case for three decades (Sterling, Kittross, 1990). A single entity could own seven AM radio, seven FM radio and seven television stations. In 1985 this limit was raised to 12 each as long as the combined television audience was less than 25 percent of the U.S. population (Owen,

¹⁷ Mara Einstein states that this presents “fundamentally flawed thinking” in that it incorrectly assumes alternative outlets have the same ability to purchase programming as the networks (pg. 74, 2004).

Wildman, 1992). This rise in ownership limits was actually a consolation prize for the deregulatory-minded FCC. Previous efforts to completely do away with ownership limits of any kind by 1990 had not been supported by Congress (Sterling, Kittross, 1990). The more lasting and most important change involving the raise of station limits was the change in philosophy of the FCC. No longer were rule changes simply minor tweaking undertaken at the request of broadcasters. This new FCC sought to undo decades of regulation thought to be in the public interest. Under this FCC leadership, the market was to decide what best served the public interest.

New Leadership

In 1987 Mark Fowler left the Federal Communications Commission. Since Ronald Reagan was still in office, he chose the replacement for FCC chairman. Reagan promoted 35-year-old Commissioner Dennis Patrick to serve in this role (FCC.gov). Under Patrick the FCC continued the agenda set in motion by Mark Fowler. The most prominent change made was the elimination of the Fairness Doctrine. As previously mentioned, the Fairness Doctrine was put in place in 1949 to make sure broadcasters presented contrasting viewpoints about issues being discussed and covered controversial subjects. This doctrine long had been a point of contention for conservatives, who saw the media as having a liberal bias and argued that the free expression of ideas was severely inhibited by government regulation (Croteau, Hoynes, 2003). Furthermore, opponents argued that a major reason for enacting the Fairness Doctrine was that the limited number of broadcast frequencies made it necessary to have strict licensing

requirements for each individual station and additional rules for programming. With the increase in media outlets over time, opponents of the doctrine argued that it was no longer needed.¹⁸ While the debates continued, the Fairness Doctrine was officially suspended for application to news in 1987 and eventually eliminated completely.¹⁹

License renewal procedures were made easier. Previously, a large amount of paperwork was required to prove that the station was obeying all laws and serving the public interest. Often this process involved massive amounts of time and costly legal fees. The process was reduced to the filing of a simple form in most cases (Albarran, 1997).

Throughout the administration of George H.W. Bush, the trend toward deregulation continued. Under FCC Chairman Alfred Sykes (1989-1993), the expiration of Fin-Syn rules continued. Sykes was an advocate of the elimination of these rules who also made the push for the development of new communication technologies such as video distribution, high definition television (HDTV) and digital audio broadcasting (DAB) (Albarran, 1997).

Most prominent during this period were new rules put into place by the lesser known Telecommunications Act of 1992.²⁰ This deregulation of FCC policy allowed

¹⁸ In 1958 there were 51 television stations and 2,600 radio stations in the United States. This number would grow continuously with the data showing 1,758 television stations and 14,124 radio stations by 2008 (Benton.org).

¹⁹ Croteau and Hoynes submit that the “scarcity” argument is irrelevant, contending that previous decisions regarding the Fairness Doctrine (including a 1969 case involving the Supreme Court) referred to the availability of frequencies, rather than the number of outlets. The authors refer to the problem of radio piracy as an example of the continued demand for prime frequency. (pg. 101, 2003).

²⁰ So noted because the Telecommunications Act of 1996 is so well known it is often referred to simply as “The Act.”

radio companies to own 30 AM and 30 FM stations nationwide (up from 12 each previously). Furthermore, the new rules allowed duopolies, permitting companies to own two stations in one market. The previous rule had allowed ownership of only one AM and one FM station per market. These new rules, put in place with little debate or media attention, opened the door to massive changes in years to come (Foege, 2008).

The “Act”

Perhaps the biggest change in media regulation came during the Bill Clinton administration under FCC Chairman Reed Hundt. Seeing innovations in technology (like the internet and cell phones) emerge, the FCC sought to make sweeping changes that would bring laws for operation as well as ownership into line with current trends. President Clinton, who was personally interested in deregulation and the market model in the broadcast industry, encouraged the passage of new laws. What emerged was the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the first major overhaul of television and radio laws since the 1934 act. What became known as “The Act” brought sweeping changes on the broadcast, cable and telephone industries.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 involved many elements, but for this project the focus is on television. Its changes were quite significant for local and national television with the most sweeping involving ownership. Many of the previous rules regarding ownership were eliminated or heavily modified. Now there was no limit on the number of stations a company could own. Station-reach laws were also changed. A single company could own stations reaching 35% of U.S. TV households, up from 25%

previously (Croteau, Hoynes, 2003). Also removed was the law banning joint radio-TV ownership in one market. Furthermore, licenses only required renewal every eight years as opposed to five (Compaine, Gomery, 2000).

Figure 3.1. FCC Regulation/Deregulation From the Early 1980's to Current Times:

	Before 1985	After 1985 Changes	After 1996 Act	Current
Number of National Outlets Per Owner	7	12/25 percent of national audience.	No Limit/35 percent of national audience.	No Limit/39 percent of national audience.
Number Per Local Market	1	1	2	2
License Rule	5 Years	5 Years	8 Years	8 Years
Cross Ownership	No	No	Yes*	Yes**

(Croteau, Hoynes, 2003), (Compaine, Gomery, 2000) and

(The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011).

*Under special circumstances.

** Still under special circumstances, but rules are relaxed (FCC.gov).

These massive changes set into motion major changes for the broadcast industry. A buying frenzy ensued that resulted in a handful of major companies buying out independent owners in markets across the country. In 1995 the top ten local television owners had \$5.9 billion in revenue and owned 104 stations. By 2002, the same companies owned around 300 stations and earned \$12 billion in revenue (The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). Other large and medium-sized station owners continued

the trend of buying up stations. The top local news station owners for the year 2006 as given by BIA Media Access Pro were as follows:

Rank	Name
1	News Corporation
2	NBC Universal
3	Viacom International Inc.
4	Tribune Co.
5	ABC/ Disney
6	Gannett Co. Inc.
7	Hearst TV Inc.
8	Belo Corp.
9	Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc.
10	Raycom Media Inc.
11	Univision Communications Inc.
12	Cox Enterprises Inc.
13	LIN Television Corporation
14	Washington Post Company
15	EW Scripps Co.
16	Meredith Corp.
17	Clear Channel Communications
18	Gray Television Inc.
19	Media General Inc.
20	Young Broadcasting Inc

A Brief Look at Radio

While this study is strictly about local television broadcast news, it is important at this point to look at how deregulation affected radio ownership and the public's perception. The case of a derailed freight train in Minot, North Dakota in 2002 (described below) is often discussed as one of the major incidents that sparked the deregulation debate and brought the public into the conversation for the first time. This would prove

very important in future discussions about deregulation of television. The landscape of radio ownership before and after broadcast deregulation looked like this:

Before 1980:

- Limit of seven AM, seven FM stations allowed by one owner.
- Only one station of each kind allowed per market
- Trafficking rule: Must hold a station for at least three years.

After 1980:

- Limit raised to 12AM and 12FM stations allowed by one owner.
- May own more than one radio station in larger markets
- May sell license (with FCC approval) at any time

After Telecommunications Act of 1996:

- In local radio, market size taken into consideration for ownership cap.
 - No limit on station ownership in national radio.
 - Can still sell license at any time (with FCC approval).
- (Croteau, Hoynes, 2001, pg. 85), (Head, Sterling, Schofield, 1994, pg. 488).

Coupled with the change in rules for Community Ascertainment Requirements, Fin Sin rules and programming quotas, the change in ownership rules would mean major changes for broadcast radio in America. Few saw the ramifications of the decisions until the changes began to take shape. Massive buyouts would ensue with major firms purchasing hundreds of radio stations. Local news became almost completely a thing of the past. Without Community Ascertainment Requirements and programming quotas, large layoffs resulted for radio news practitioners. News was often piped in from a national source and local radio news departments all but disappeared. The fallout was tremendous. Since 1996 over half of all U.S. radio stations have been sold to major firms. “Every market is dominated by two or three firms that own nearly all of the stations between them. The firms have stripped radio of local content, especially journalism, and have substituted generic, inexpensive local programming” (McChesney, 2008, pg. 419).

A lightning rod for the abrupt changes was Clear Channel Communications. At one point Clear Channel ballooned to almost 1,200 stations nationwide-the number now stands at 850 after sell-offs (commoncause.org). FCC Commissioner Gloria Tristani warned about the loss of localism after the Telecommunications Act of 1996, “Eventually, the danger is that with national play lists, nationally syndicated programming, and outsourced news, everything ends up sounding the same” (Croteau, Hoynes, 2008, pg. 163). This would prove prophetic a few short years later.

A now famous incident awakened a once largely uninformed and disengaged public in the deregulation argument. It happened in 2002 in Minot, North Dakota. Around 3:25am on January 18, 2002 a Canadian Pacific Railway train freight train derailed, hurling nearly 30 cars off the tracks and spilling a cloud of anhydrous ammonia fertilizer over the town of Minot. Despite the enormity of the accident, no public warning was issued over local radio until nearly 90 minutes after the accident. In the end, one person was killed and 300 more were injured (Foege, 2008).

In the days that followed, knowledge surfaced that police had called the radio station that was the designated emergency broadcaster, but nobody answered. As it turned out, all six of Minot’s radio stations were owned by Clear Channel Communications, which was not broadcasting live, but piping in a satellite feed to the local stations. With all of the stations being owned by the same company, word didn’t get out until much too late (Croteau, Hoynes, 2008). The case would become a national example of the dangers of consolidation. Complaints from none other than the police chief of Minot rattled citizens and received national attention.

Regardless of the negative publicity, the buyouts and consolidation continued. However, this story served as a wake-up call to an uninformed public and elected officials opposed to consolidation. As new pro-deregulation leadership took hold in the FCC, it faced new opposition stoked by Clear Channel and the events in Minot, North Dakota.

Further Attempts to Deregulate

In the years following the Telecommunications act of 1996, promises were made to broadcast groups to further ease ownership rules and perhaps completely eliminate cross ownership rules. The FCC considered another considerable relaxation of its remaining media ownership laws. The plan was to have the matter resolved and completed by 2003 (McChesney, 2008). On June 2nd, 2003 the FCC voted on a 3-2 party line vote (Croteau, Hoynes, 2006) to further relax ownership regulations so that one broadcast group would be allowed to own enough stations to reach 45% of all viewers (up from 35%). Amidst public outcry (some stemming from what happened with radio), the House of Representatives and Senate voted on November 25 of 2003 to overturn the new ownership cap.²¹ Following this reversal, congressional leaders reached a compromise with President George W. Bush (who had threatened to veto the overturn) to allow ownership limits to be set at 39% (Croteau, Hoynes, 2006). Many argue that this

²¹ Interestingly, Robert McChesney, one of the leading researchers on this topic, suggests that the overwhelming majority of the United States population, "Conservatively, 99 percent," had no understanding whatsoever about the process of policy making surrounding regulation/deregulation before the 2003 debate. That enough public protest was raised to cause a reconsideration of the new policy is clearly notable.

number was settled on because Viacom and News Corporation were already in violation of the 35% ownership rule in expectation of the cap being raised (www.ibltv.org), (fcc.gov). The result was groundbreaking. For the first time, media groups and the public began to push back against what they saw as too much concentration in ownership. “None of the FCC Chairman Michael Powell’s media deregulation proposals had come to pass, having been blocked by a Congress increasingly distressed by the past behavior of companies like Clear Channel. A defeated Powell resigned from his post in January 2005” (Foege, 2008, pg. 232).

In its 2006 quadrennial review the FCC largely upheld the rules put in place in the 2003 decisions. One exception was a slight relaxation of the newspaper/broadcast cross ownership rule that had existed for nearly 30 years. Beginning in 1975 the FCC had banned cross-ownership by a single entity of a daily newspaper and television or radio broadcast station that operated in the same media market. In the 2006 review (the rule change actually happened in 2007) the FCC determined that it would now evaluate any proposed cross-ownership combination on a case-by-case basis to determine whether it would be in the public interest. The FCC’s decision was met with considerable protest and lawsuits and never fully implemented (www.pbs.org/now/politics/mediatimeline), (fcc.gov).

In the most recent quadrennial review (2010), the FCC sought to finalize plans for cross-ownership, but has put the decision on hold in order to wait for a study to determine how the rule would impact minority ownership. A decision has still not been reached at the time of this writing. Other rules regarding ownership have remained largely intact (Bachman, 2013, Para. 1).

A Current Look

Studies show the larger media groups growing at the present time. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism shows Sinclair, Lin Media and Nexstar (now third largest) continuing to buy stations. The study quotes one chief executive as saying that ownership is highly inefficient for companies outside of the top ten ownership groups and he further predicts that soon there will be no more than a dozen ownership groups in local television news left. Local ad revenue remains relatively steady, with significant help from election cycles (Pew Research Center-stateofthemedial.org). Despite concerns of shifting viewership, the major companies are clearly continuing to grow, finding value in acquisitions and corporate growth.

On a large scale, the media we see, use and interact with each day is now owned mostly by just six companies. In 1983 90% of the media was owned by 50 companies. By the year 2011 that same 90% was owned by only six (GE, News-Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, CBS). This same "big six" also owns 70% of all cable stations in America (Lutz, Business Insider, June 14, 2012).

On a smaller scale, we see similarities with local television ownership. The majority of local television stations in the United States are now owned by 21 companies (Pew Center, State of the News Media, 2012). This number will quickly shrink to 20 if a planned buyout of Belo Corporation by Gannett is approved later in 2013. Previously, ownership limits would have made this type of consolidation impossible in local television. However, since 1995, the number of companies owning commercial television

stations in the United States has declined by more than 40% (Common Cause, Media and Democracy).

One hint of potentially good news from the Pew study is that the news staffs are slightly increasing. However, according to the existing literature, this can be quite deceiving on two levels. The first is the amount of news being produced. The most recent RTDNA/Hofstra University annual survey found a median increase in all television newsrooms staffs from 30 in 2005 to 32 in 2012. This is an average seven percent increase in television newsrooms across America. However, this must be coupled with the amount of news produced by those newsrooms. The same study shows the average amount of news produced by those newsrooms at 3.7 hours per day in 2005 (Papper, 2005). The number of hours produced in 2012 was 5.5 hours (Papper, 2012). This is an increase of nearly 49%. These numbers beg the question, are staff sizes increasing at an amount equal to the required news production, or are practitioners doing significantly more work? Considering that research early in the deregulation process showed most local news operations airing around 2.5 hours of news per day (Kannis, 1991), we can see a steadily increasing trend in local news programming.

The literature regarding regulatory history in the United States is extensive. As we read in this section, there is also a vast amount of information regarding current trends in station ownership, staff sizes and budgets. However, what we do not see in the many works of Barnouw, Croteau and Hoynes and the many Pew Center studies is a focus on the practitioners and their thoughts and opinions of the changing landscape of local broadcast television news. This research extends the previous studies by focusing on the

practitioners and putting them into the conversation about the changes to the industry.

Hopefully, this inclusion will be a permanent part of future research.

Chapter Four:
Theory and Methods

The theory and methods for this study go hand in hand. Since the study uses grounded theory, the discovery of theories that apply result from analysis of the research. A breakdown of the methods used, followed by a look at the theories that emerged during analysis is the clearest way to explain how the results were attained.

What is Grounded Theory?

Grounded theory is a system by which theories are derived from careful analysis of data. Rather than beginning with a theory or theories in mind, the data is analyzed allowing theories to emerge. Many qualitative researchers find that this allows for a greater truth from the research and provides more validity than starting with a theory and testing whether or not the research fits into that mold. “Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss, Corbin, pg.12). In short, grounded theory involves building theory, rather than testing it.

Grounded theory is a slow, but effective process. Rather than setting up a test, it involves creating a situation in which participants are allowed to talk back, discuss and share thoughts and opinions. This method requires significant interviewing and careful analysis. This is, in essence, the core of qualitative research. “Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. It is the

search among data to identify content for ethnographies and for participants' "truths" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, pg. 150).

Scholars developed grounded theory out of criticism that qualitative research did not result in significant findings because they couldn't be generalized. Researchers such as Glaser and Strauss were at the forefront of this method in the 1960's. In their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* they described a rationale and method in which researchers could move beyond simple data description and ultimately provide theory through careful analysis. This allows for what is known as "constant comparative" analysis. Theories are generated and elaborated upon through the interplay of data collection and analysis. This allows perceived patterns to be tested throughout the research through further analysis. Researchers accomplish grounded theory by building an argument for a certain theory and testing it throughout the study as data is accumulated. Theories can be fortified or proven invalid through the course of the study. However, if proper research guidelines are in place, with a valid number of participants and analysis, theories are likely to emerge and prove consistent (Potter, 1996).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) provide practical examples of situations in which grounded theory might be most effective. One example is of the new head of an agency learning that errors are slipping through that cost the agency time and money, despite employees having good qualifications and a strong work ethic. Through interviews and analysis of the data it was learned that new employees are warned that another worker was fired for catching an error made by the boss. Therefore, employees learned not to report mistakes, for fear of reprisal. This led to theories regarding morale, professionalism, autonomy or security. This is, of course, an overly simplified example,

but offers a view of grounded theory emerging from ethnographic study and inductive reasoning.

Why Use Grounded Theory?

The purpose of this study is discovery. It is not a test of a previously given hypothesis or a qualitative analysis of corporations, stations or practitioners. The overarching research question (*What was the impact of broadcast deregulation during a time of technological advancement and audience fragmentation on practitioners of broadcast television news?*) does not easily lend itself, on the surface, to generally used theories. To think that it does lends the study to bias and would likely not result in the level of discovery needed to provide valid results.

Examples of the effective use of grounded theory in media research are abundant. James Lull used grounded theory in his study of punk culture in San Francisco. Tamar Leibes and Elihu Katz also used grounded theory in a study of the television show “Dallas.” The researchers sifted through the data seeking patterns. Throughout this method, the authors were able to develop concepts of primordality and seriality as explanations about why the viewing of the show was so important to people. Jeanne Rogge used grounded theory in a study of the importance of media to German families in everyday life. Rogge then built generalizations to make a distinction between objective and subjective media reality. Several of the authors cited Strauss and Corbin as offering guidelines to the grounded theory used in their particular studies (Potter, 1996).

With this in mind, it is clear that a study with the only preconceived notion that changes have been made could benefit from using the grounded theory approach. Comparing data and allowing concepts to grow so they could be compared seemed the best way to analyze theories that might evolve throughout the course of the study.

Why In-Depth Interviews?

As previously mentioned, the purpose of the study was to provide a platform for veterans of broadcast news to explain their opinions, feelings and thoughts about the effects of change on broadcast news during a certain time period. Without questions, there are many methods that might effectively offer insight into this question. In this author's estimation, however, the best way to complete the process of discovering data, concepts and theories was through in-depth interviews and open coding analysis.

While many types of interviews exist in qualitative research, three characteristics can be found in all of them. The first, and most obvious, characteristic is that the interview conducted is similar to a conversation. Whether it starts that way or not, it will generally become a conversation through the asking of probing questions. The questions are not all closed-ended questions, intended to fill in a questionnaire, but are designed to allow for significant probing. The second is that qualitative interviewers are more interested in gaining insight into a situation or phenomena than categorizing answers based on predetermined academic theories (thus using grounded theory). Third, the interview is essentially "alive." Whether unstructured or semi-structured, the qualitative interview may take many angles or go down many roads of discussion based on the

response of the participant. This often results in considerable probing and follow up by the interviewer. The point is that whether there is structure or not to begin with, the interviewer can and should let the interview take its course in order to make considerable discovery of meaning (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Expert Support for Interviews

Experts in the field of research support the use of interviews as the main or partial method of gathering information for a study. Marshall and Rossman (1999) contend that the most important benefits of using interviews is that they allow the researcher to gather large amounts of data quickly across a wide array of subjects. While the word “quickly” might be contestable, especially when conducting thorough, in-depth interviews, there is little doubt that obtaining information across a wide range (in the case of this study, different markets) of participants is possible. It also allows the researcher to probe beyond the initial questions and seek “immediate follow-up and clarification” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, pg. 110).

The benefits particular to this study are the understanding of events and situations in which I did not participate. Armed with only the understanding that deregulation led to expanded corporate ownership and that changes took place as a result, I set out to understand what the changes had led to and whether the participants considered them positive or negative. Interviewing also allows the researcher to extend the “intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical locations” (Rubin and

Rubin, 1995, pg.1). This was particularly important in this study, considering that my goal was to understand the effects of deregulation in more than one market.

Perhaps most important is that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to understand events that cannot be observed directly by other means (Lindlof, 1995). The purpose of this research study was to develop an understanding of changed situations facing practitioners of local broadcast television news. This area was largely un-researched previously and my goal was to move beyond the statistics regarding station ownership and develop an understanding of what ownership changes meant to those working practitioners. This goal could only be reached by understanding personal experiences and following trends emerging through the interviews.

What is Open Coding?

Simply put, coding is how we analyze collected data. In the case of this research the collected data is in-depth interviews that have been transcribed. *Open coding* is the thorough process of conducting line by line analysis of these completed interviews. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin spent decades researching and providing instruction for the process of open coding/grounded theory. They define open coding as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss, Corbin, 1998, pg. 101).

The process of open coding has many parts. The early stages of open coding are rather unstructured as we move through what is known as microanalysis. In doing this, line by line or even word by word analysis is completed in its purest form. Notes are

taken in margins, potential common themes are written down and commonalities are discovered that later form into larger concepts, which grow into categories and sub-categories.

“During open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed “categories” (Strauss, Corbin, pg. 102).

The authors further describe *concepts* as the building blocks of theory. Whereby ideas that are beginning to form are given labels (such as “morale” or “workload”). Goldstone and Kersten view the definition of concepts as “a mentally possessed idea or notion.” and of a category as “a set of entities that are grouped together” (Goldstone, Kersten, 2003, Pg. 600). Concepts and categories go hand in hand. Many concepts are discovered and compared. When concepts prove to be consistent throughout the work, they can be developed into categories and sub-categories. This is an ongoing process as interviews are transcribed, analyzed and coded. Categories and sub-categories emerge, making the research come into focus. As the process continues, many concepts discovered in the examination process fit into already existing categories. However, there is always room for new categories and sub-categories to emerge.

Thick Description

This study also involves an element of *thick description*. This method was popularized by Clifford Geertz in his 1973 article *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, pg. 18). Thick description makes use of the researcher's first-hand experience to give a multidimensional understanding of the research. This technique begins with interview notes that may describe the environment of the interview, or the demeanor of the subject and continues through careful analysis of the data. Thick description helps the researcher to gather, synthesize and analyze the data that will go into the research (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In the case of this study, not only does this method play a role in the gathering of information, but also provides additional support for reliability and validity in describing the surroundings and actions of the participants. While thick description alone clearly does not provide validity and reliability, similar reactions, agitations and annoyances among participants can show consistency that lends support to the results.

Validity and Reliability

The standards for judging the quality of research are standardized in qualitative research. As Potter (1996) describes, there are three components for judging qualitative research: reliability, validity and utility. For a study to be reliable it must show consistency and stability in the data. In the case of this particular study, the standardization of the initial set of questions provides consistency and stability. Each

participant started with the same criteria for discussion and the overwhelming majority responded similarly. There was no wavering in the opportunity for all participants to offer responses entirely their own. Based on the standardized starting point for each in-depth interview, the findings could be replicated by another researcher using the same standards for participation and interview questions.

Validity is comprised of internal and external validity. Internal validity is defined by Denzin and Lincoln as “the degree to which findings correctly map the phenomenon in question” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, pg. 186). In this particular study, I was looking at broadcast deregulation in a time of technological change and market fragmentation. The study is not without limitations (as have been described), but to the extent of the sample base, we can determine that internal validity exists in the consistency of interview responses to the questions given. Since the study was initiated to discover the effects of change caused by deregulation, accuracy is found through the consistency of responses and the methods for which the data was collected.

External validity involves the issue of generalization. The question is, can we generalize the results of these findings to other settings and locations? This was the basis for choosing to conduct interviews in three separate media markets. Findings in a single market would only prove that the phenomenon exists in that particular market. However, if findings are consistent with research done in more than one media market, external validity is then reliable within the constraints of the study. In this case, we have external validity for practitioners in major media markets. The same cannot be applied to medium or smaller markets (although they may, in fact, be the same). Based on the data discovered and analyzed for this study, we can determine that external validity exists

among those experienced practitioners, who are now working in major media markets. It could be argued that these results are applicable across the board in every sized market, but within the limits of this study, we find external validity in the market size through which the study was conducted.

The third component is utility. This component calls into question the usefulness of the research to others in the scholarly field. It has been my argument since proposing this research that discovery of the extent and effects of these deregulatory changes has been limited by the lack of inclusion of the practitioner's viewpoint. Countless quantitative studies exist regarding station ownership, employment numbers, etc. Adding in the qualitative data discovered through this study helps to offer a complete view of the effects of deregulation and corporate ownership during that time of sweeping change. Utility is perhaps the clearest of these criteria for judging the quality of this work.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also include a fourth component in the question of validity and reliability; objectivity. While the primary researcher in this case is a veteran of local broadcast television news, the idea for the study grew out of a question, rather than a personal belief. Furthermore, the research design was the result of the suggestions of several other scholars involved in overseeing the study. The guiding list of questions at the base of the study's interviews were designed to ensure that responses were objective and achieved a range of data that answered the many sub-questions also included in the study. Strict adherence was paid to the understanding that the only assumption given at the start of the research was that changes came about as a result of deregulation.

Participants

At the outset there was significant discussion regarding the number of participants that should be used in this study. I decided that thirty interviews would be conducted, transcribed and analyzed in order to ensure a higher level of validity.

Finding participants proved quite a task. In order to gain the desired insight into the situation and get full, well explained answers to the research questions, various criteria were set. First, all of the participants were to be chosen in equal numbers from three separate markets. This would prevent the possibility of obtaining findings and conclusions from a market that was potentially an outlier in terms of how changes in deregulation policy had affected the practitioners.

Second, the participants were to have at least fifteen years of experience as professional broadcast practitioners. Since the general focus of the research was the ten years following the Telecommunications act of 1996, only participants who began in the business before the Act and remained after it would be suitable for the study.

The requirement of fifteen years experience in the business combined with the requirement to interview in three separate markets made it challenging to choose the markets. Since few practitioners with a minimum of fifteen years of experience worked in small to mid-sized markets, it was decided that three large media markets would be used.²² To make interviews accessible for me, Washington, DC, Baltimore, Maryland, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were selected as the markets for participation.

²² See Appendix B for listing of major media markets.

Finally, the participants were to be practitioners of broadcast news, but not holding direct or permanent management roles. The goal of the overarching research question was to discover how changes in FCC policy toward deregulation affected practitioners. Since management works with ownership, those in that category were seen as unsuited for this study. Therefore, the term “practitioners” for this research, includes anchors, reporters, producers, assignment editors and production specialists (photographers, editors, etc.). While it is possible that some of the participants worked in management at one point, or had some connection with management, I tried to avoid selecting participants with management experience.

To find qualified participants in each market snowball sampling was used. Since I did not have personal knowledge of enough potential participants, this method made the most sense and was the most useful. I began with prior knowledge of potential participants in each market (either through personal knowledge or research of stations in those markets) and moved to the snowball sample from that point. In snowball sampling, once participants are located, they are asked to provide information about others who may qualify for the study, based on the given criteria. The word “snowball” is in reference to the accumulation that takes place until a proper sample size is reached (Babbie, 2002, Pg. 179). A case can be made for using snowball sampling in this type of qualitative, interview based, research. James Potter cites a study (*Inside prime time*. New York: Pantheon) that started with Todd Gitlin contacting a few people in the television industry. “Through a series of referrals, he ended up interviewing 200 producers, actors, writers, agents and executives” (Potter, 1996, pg. 107).

Despite my guarantees of anonymity, and assurance of deletion of the recorded files upon completion of this project, many practitioners declined to participate in the study for fear of reprisal. Those who declined participation showed enthusiasm for the research in almost every case with many asking to read the dissertation upon its completion. Finding ten willing participants in each market who met all of the criteria, however, proved to be time consuming. Significant snowball sampling and persistent requests eventually led to completion of the interview process.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland was granted in March of 2007 and later renewed through April of 2009. Each participant was contacted with a participation request letter in which the project was described. Upon agreement to participate each practitioner was presented with a participant agreement form in which he or she was asked to agree to be recorded. For those who were interviewed via telephone, the form was sent and verbal agreement was secured.

Transcriptions

Each interview was transcribed and printed for analysis. I shared the duties of transcribing the interviews with a professional transcriptionist. An agreement of silence about the materials and anonymity was reached via a contract with the transcriptionist. The transcription process took a considerable amount of time due to the length of the interviews. Each of the interviews was printed and numbered by line so that line by line analysis could be performed and specific quotes and areas could be referenced. This proved most useful in dissecting and analyzing the raw data.

Analysis

Through an extensive undertaking of open coding and recoding, I discovered nine major categories and many sub-categories in the data. The microanalysis began with what is known among researchers as wild coding. Terms such as “hectic”, “staff proportions”, “branded” and “control” began to emerge as commonly used terminology. Upon a second analysis these commonly used terms were given colors for identification. Through continued analysis, as identified by color coordination, categories emerged and sub-categories were discovered. This was a long, but effective process. An understanding of the terminology used in the business allowed for better formation of like terms into concepts and categories than one might get from computer software designed to help with such research. Through this examination of approximately 1,500 pages of interview transcripts, the following categories emerged from the more abstract concepts:

1. News Philosophy/Style

Sub Categories-24 hour news, filling time, story count, growing competition/choices, cultivation of style and brand.

2. Staffing

Sub Categories-Shrinking staffs/attrition, shrinking staffs/layoffs, less experienced help

3. Money

Sub-Categories-Station’s financial issues, cost cutting, profit margins

4. Job Satisfaction

Sub Categories-Job security, morale, workload, time issues

5. Fear

Sub Categories-Losing jobs, losing resources/money

6. Ownership

Sub Categories-Local, non-local

7. Management

Sub Categories-Consultants, hierarchy

8. Technology

Sub Categories-Change, types of technology

9. Professionalism

Public responsibility

Through this analysis, concepts, themes, ideas and categories became clear in the interviews. While conditions in each market proved slightly different, these categories and sub-categories remained intact and consistent throughout. The coding of concepts that became categories is strictly indicative of comments made by the practitioners during interviews. Significant analysis was needed in order to put these categories and sub-categories into meaningful context. For example, the category of Money with sub-categories of station's financial issues, cost cutting, profit margins, etc. could have been indicative of economic hardship caused by a downturn in the economy. While a looming recession may have played a role, the practitioners interviewed largely claimed that money concerns for the station were due in large part to expanded corporate ownership and a newfound focus on running the station from a profit driven market model standpoint. Examples are given in the results sections of this document.

Saturation Point

The question of the correct number of interviews to be used in a study is often debated. It was decided early on that this study would involve thirty in-depth interviews. This would consist of ten interviews in three separate media markets (Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, PA and Baltimore, MD). It was believed at the time of the research design that this would ensure that a point of saturation could be reached. Strauss and Corbin describe the saturation point as the point when “the researcher finds that no new data are being unearthed. Any new data would only add, in a minor way, to the many variations of major patterns” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pg.292).

The point of saturation was, in fact, reached in each market after approximately six interviews. All major patterns, themes and theories were solidified at that point and no significant new findings occurred. However, the additional interviews proved interesting and beneficial to the study in several ways. Many stories, examples and interesting variations and exceptions were discovered through the extended number of interviews. Some examples of this are the story of Monica (and many similar versions), slight variations on the data, and the concept of what I have named “traditional journalism as reward.” This will be described in detail in the results section.

In retrospect, it might have been interesting to change the number of interviews to six per market and conduct the interviews in four or five markets rather than three. Hindsight is 20/20, but knowing the saturation point could offer some insight for future research and perhaps expand the region of inquiry.

Emerging Concepts

During the initial analysis of coding it became clear that two areas were emerging as potential theories. These two areas, described below, have been analyzed for years and cited in media research. The final analysis and implications will be discussed in the conclusions. Below are descriptions and history of the two emerging concepts.

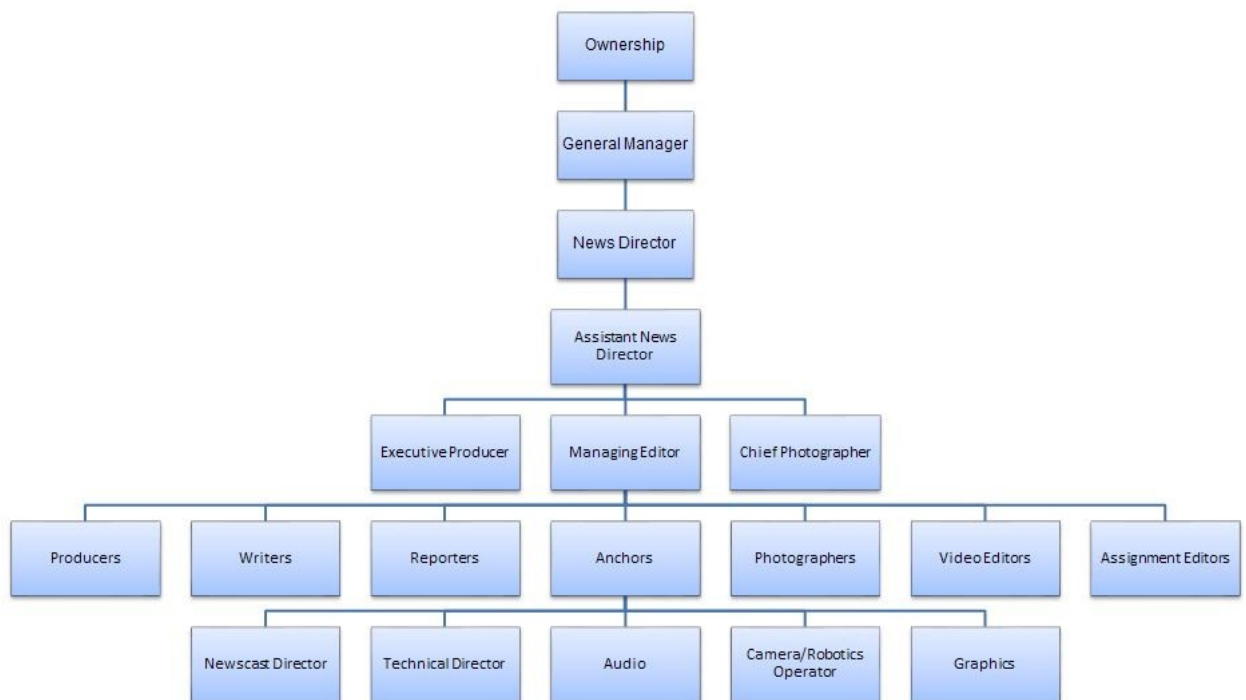
Hierarchy of Influences

It stands to reason that when asked how changes in laws surrounding ownership affect practitioners of news organizations, practitioners would point to corporate and managerial structure. Whether positive or negative, any changes would point to the structure and routines put into place by the organization. Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese have done extensive research on the role of organizational structure and its effects on practitioners and content. While their study does not necessarily focus on news content, it is hard to avoid when discussing how changes in routines have affected practitioners and the way they produce content on a daily basis. Let us first examine how Shoemaker and Reese put the hierarchical structure into context in terms of a news organization and follow this with the theories that emerged through the grounded research.

In looking at local broadcast television news, we must understand that network affiliates have a very strict power structure. While it may appear on the surface that reporters have autonomy to cover stories as they see fit and in a manner that they choose,

this is not necessarily the case. Each practitioner answers to a higher authority within the organization. Every level of manager answers to a higher manager and ultimately to ownership. As discussed previously, while stations once were owned by a small group or private individual (there was always corporate ownership as well, but caps on the number of stations the corporation could own still applied), ownership has changed tremendously through deregulation. The owner of a television station may be in a different state and own many other stations. Thus control over so many television newsrooms takes a corporate approach.

Figure 4.1. Basic Structure of a Television Newsroom



Shoemaker and Reese pointed out that the ultimate power of the organization lies in ownership (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996). Within news organizations, it is up to ownership

to hire top management and put in place a suitable structure. Regardless of the size of the ownership group, the bottom line in television news is advertising dollars. In general more successful a newsroom, the more advertising can be sold and at a higher price. Therefore, competition is fierce among news organizations to attract viewers and gain revenue. Traditionally, owners have sought out highly effective managers to instill and maintain a system of news programming that will draw in viewers and generate the needed advertising dollars to operate.

The influence of the organizational structure on practitioners can be both direct and indirect. While each practitioner answers to a particular manager, at various levels of the hierarchical structure, influence may be difficult to recognize. "It is understood that the autonomy of the news divisions safeguards their objectivity, and the larger corporation is not to interfere with their news judgment" (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996, pg. 158). It is interesting to note that while the authors are referring to corporate ownership and their influence on the network news divisions, this model has come into play in local news with deregulation. Large corporations now owning many television stations have established a managerial system that works more like a chain of command, but still pays lip service to news judgment at the station level. The method of running the news organization is top-down and thus can influence the practitioners through branding, station focus and coverage plans. With corporate structure becoming the norm new expectations are created.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) discuss the growing complexity that continues to insert hierarchical levels between front-line media practitioners and management. The authors note that the more complex the organization becomes, the less sensitive

management will be to the professional concerns of their workers. In newsrooms where management and ownership were once accessible to employees, this relationship becomes more distant with a large, corporate structure that is often not in-house. “Absentee owners may be less inclined to adopt a vigorous editorial policy and aggressive news coverage. The greater the physical distance of the owners from the community being served, the more community interests may take a backseat to corporate and economic factors” (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996, pg. 167).

With a corporate structure in place, this often leads to budget cuts not before seen or dealt with by practitioners. The business model requires profit from the whole conglomerate and one station may see cuts or changes to organizational structure to help suit another, struggling organization. “A new breed of budget-cutting market-oriented managers has been installed to oversee many newsrooms” (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996, pg. 157). This is a change in philosophy from the past when an individual station needed only be concerned with its own well being and profit.

Budget concerns and re-organization can lead directly to changes in routine, which are at the heart of this study. While technological change has always been a constant in the broadcast news industry, constraints on budgets can alter the way news is gathered, changing the time for needed routine as well as the angle and scope of the final product. These are changes that clearly affect practitioners on many levels.

Social/Civic Responsibility

Social responsibility is a concept that suggests that profit margins must be balanced with a concern for the public interest. In broadcast news, this used to be considered especially important because broadcasters transmit signals through public airwaves. For nearly half a century, a sense of responsibility to the public was widely accepted and even enforced in broadcasting. However, with the growth and consolidation of the media in the 1980's and especially 1990's, this balance began to shift in favor of profit margins over a concern for the public interest (Croteau, Hoynes, 2006).

The idea of social responsibility for the news media took hold in the 1940's, as outlined by Denis McQuail (2000 and 2002). After widespread criticism of the American newspaper press, a special commission, led by Robert Hutchins, chancellor of the University of Chicago, was set up to investigate if the American press was succeeding or failing in a goal of public service. The commission was critical of the press primarily for the limitation of voices outside of a privileged few. The term "Social Responsibility" came out of this commission. It also outlined key journalistic standards by which the press should operate. It called for it to:

- Provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning.
- Serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism and be a common carrier of the public expression.
- Give a representative picture of constituent groups in society and also present and clarify the goals and values of society. (McQuail, 2000, pgs. 148 & 149).

In short, the concept of ‘social responsibility’ viewed media ownership as a form of public trust, to be viewed and practiced in the public interest as opposed to a private franchise strictly for profit.

With the rise of television and broadcast news, the Radio Television Digital News Association,²³ founded in 1946, developed its own code of ethics outlining its responsibility to the public. The preamble begins with the insistence that “Professional electronic journalists should operate as trustees of the public, seek the truth, report it fairly and with integrity and independence, and stand accountable for their actions” (rtdna.org). The code further explained that electronic journalists should recognize that their first obligation is to the public. While the delicate balance of serving the public interest and earning money ebbed and flowed, the idea of a responsibility to the public remained intact with news organizations and practitioners for decades. Until deregulation began in the 1980’s, the Federal Communications Commission acted on the assumption that broadcasting was a public trust. Under some circumstances the FCC even intervened to assure that the public trust was being upheld (McQuail, 2000). This concept came under fire in recent years, especially after passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, with many arguing that the market should decide what is in the best interest of the public, rather than news organizations themselves.

²³ Originally called the Radio Television News Directors Association.

Chapter Five-Findings

Introduction

The Questions

The main research question for the study was: *What was the impact of broadcast deregulation during a time of technological advancement and audience fragmentation on practitioners of broadcast television news?*

The following research questions were also part of the study. They are overriding questions that were expected to be answered after the completion of the interviews:

RQ1: *Are the changes positive or negative in terms of broadcast news?*

RQ2: *How, exactly, have the structural changes affected daily routines of news professionals?*

RQ3: *Are views and practices of professional responsibility and autonomy intact?*

RQ4: *How has morale in the newsroom been affected?*

RQ5: *Do news professionals feel that changes have affected the quality of news they are able to deliver to the public?*

The questions listed above were not necessarily asked directly (although during significant probing, some of them were occasionally touched on or asked outright, depending on the participant's response). Details of each interview are given at the beginning of the findings chapter for each market. The following list of questions was used as an initial guideline, to be followed by probing comments from me:

Interview Protocol

- PQ1: What's going on in broadcast news?
- PQ2: How long have you worked in broadcast news?
- PQ3: Are you familiar with deregulation?
- PQ4: Have things changed in the newsroom over the last 10-15 years? How?
- PQ5: Has your job description changed? (not asked if the response to Q-4 was "no")
- PQ6: What is your daily work routine like?
- PQ7: Is that routine the same as it's always been?
- PQ8: Are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?
- PQ9: How many hours of news programming does your station do each day? Was it always this number?
- PQ10: Is the newsroom staff you work with the same size as the one you've always worked with?
- PQ11: Does your station have a "brand" of news? Who decides what it is?
- PQ12: How is that decision put into motion?
- PQ13: How independent are you in terms of making decisions? Constraints? From whom?
(If less autonomy why?)
- PQ14: Are you happy with this degree of autonomy? Does it offend your journalistic morality in some way?
- PQ15: What is the structure of supervision for your particular job?
- PQ16: Are you satisfied with the amount of information you are able to deliver to the public?
- PQ17: Do you feel a sense of responsibility to the public?
- PQ18: What is morale like in the newsroom?
- PQ19: Do you like your job as much as you did at first?
- PQ20: Would you enter the business now if you were fresh out of college-knowing what you know?

This list of questions was asked of each participant and followed up with further questions depending on the response. The purpose of using in-depth interviews for this

study was to probe and ask many follow up questions. While many of these questions are not open ended they provided a starting point by which I was able to ask questions based on a response. The questions also allowed me to calculate the number of yes or no answers in certain areas. During live interviews closed ended questions are often not useful. However, during a lengthy interview they can prove very valuable in beginning a line of questioning on a specific topic.

Interviews were not completed by markets one at a time (Baltimore and Washington D.C. were done concurrently, by participant availability, and Pittsburgh was done largely during two trips to the city). For this study I have described the findings from each market. In the concluding chapter larger questions are addressed, based on the answers given and analyzed in each market.

My interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2009. Unfortunately, due to the pressures of my employment, they were not transcribed until sometime later (2009 through 2011). I believe they remain useful for academic research, however, because they offer a valid depiction of broadcast news operations from the perspective of broadcast journalists during a period of substantial change due to shifts in station ownership and federal deregulation of the broadcast industry. I have not had an opportunity to conduct follow-up interviewing, although that is a project I would like to undertake. What I have read and observed, however, leads me to believe that the changes in local broadcast television news discussed in the interviews are continuing to take place today.

Baltimore Market Findings

The Baltimore market (Media Market Ranking #27) consists of four television stations that produce local broadcast news. The oldest of these stations is WMAR-TV Channel 2. WMAR is the ABC affiliate and is currently owned by the E.W. Scripps Company. The station follows the *ABC 2 Works For You* “Brand.” At the time of the interviews, E.W. Scripps owned 17 stations across the United States.

Baltimore’s second oldest station is WBAL, which has been owned by the Hearst Corporation since its inception in 1948. WBAL follows the *Action News* “brand.” At the time of the interviews, the Hearst Corporation owned 29 stations across the country.

WJZ-TV is Baltimore’s CBS affiliate and the only O & O station (owned and operated by the network) in the city. It follows the *Eyewitness News* brand. CBS operates 29 local affiliates in the United States.

WBFF is Baltimore’s Fox affiliate. It is owned by the Sinclair Broadcast Group and is the flagship station of Sinclair. At the time of the interviews, Sinclair Broadcast Group owned 60 television stations across the country (www.wmar.com, www.wbaltv.com, <http://baltimore.cbslocal.com>, www.foxbaltimore.com, www.stationindex.com, and participant interviews).

Participants

To maintain confidentiality under human subjects review guidelines, the participants are referred to by pseudonyms. The names of their stations are not given;

however, some participants refer to their station and other stations by call letters. All participant descriptions reflect experience and newsroom position at the time of the interview.

Jack is a 26 year veteran of broadcast news. He currently works as an anchor reporter. The interview was conducted in a private meeting room at Jack's station in Baltimore on August 8, 2008. It lasted 48 minutes.

Ronald is a 24 year veteran of broadcast news. He works in Baltimore where he is a general assignment reporter. The interview was conducted via telephone on December 10, 2008. It lasted 68 minutes.

Brenda is an 18 year veteran of broadcast news. She plans to stay at her current station as long as she is in the news business. She currently works as a general assignment reporter. The interview was conducted via telephone on January 8, 2009. It lasted 47 minutes.

Steve is a 15 year veteran of the broadcast news industry. Steve has worked in three different media markets. He is currently a full-time photographer. The interview was conducted at a restaurant in the Baltimore area on July 23, 2008. It lasted 49 minutes.

Curt is a 30 year veteran of the broadcast news industry. He is the producer for some of his station's main evening newscasts. The interview was conducted via telephone on March 23, 2009. It lasted 45 minutes.

Mitch is a 26 year veteran of broadcast news. He is a reporter/investigative reporter. The interview was conducted via telephone on February 22, 2009. It lasted 61 minutes.

Sherrie is a 30 year veteran of broadcast news. She is an investigative reporter. The interview was conducted via telephone on March 26, 2008. It lasted 50 minutes.

Leonard is an 18 year veteran of broadcast news. He has worked as a producer and is now an online content editor. The interview was conducted via telephone on January 28, 2009. It lasted 58 minutes.

Jake is a 22 year veteran of the broadcast news business. He is a long time reporter in the Baltimore market. The interview was conducted via telephone on March 18, 2009. It lasted 57 minutes.

Sheldon is a 37 year veteran of the industry. He serves many capacities in his station's sports department. The interview was conducted via telephone on August 20, 2008. It lasted 56 minutes.

Results-Baltimore

The response to the first participant question (PQ1) proved to be very telling of the mindset and overall attitude of the participants.

PQ1: What's going on in broadcast news?

The overwhelming response to this question by all ten participants, directly or indirectly was “change.” Nine out of the ten described the change as negative or very negative and one described it as neither positive nor negative. Responses were quick; little time was needed to wait for answers. Consistency was found in the general response to the question which fell easily into the coding categories described previously.

Ronald, a general assignment reporter, described the situation as follows:

What's going on? A lot of layoffs, probably very disgruntled people right now. Job cuts, you name it. It's just running the gamut right now. A lot of people fearing for their job and stuff like that and it's turning into something where a lot of people are pretty much thinking about getting out. I know I am.

This quote is illustrative of the general response given when discussing layoffs, buyouts, shrinking staff by attrition, etc. The concerns over shrinking staffs and layoffs led directly to two very well defined additional categories. The first is *Fear*. Participants described fear in many ways and having many effects on practitioners and their attitudes. Fear of losing jobs because the station needed to meet the bottom line was expressed repeatedly. Sherrie, a thirty year veteran and investigative reporter, summed up the fear that many respondents discussed:

I think there are so many money problems that, uh, you know, everyone's afraid to lose their job and so there's very little, uh speaking out independently and making editorial statements. Everyone has gotten tender hooks about whether they should, you know, be original or speaking out or being good at their craft. It's a fairly intimidating situation right now.

Fear played into many areas of concern for the participants. Those who discussed fear in this initial question were all in agreement that the fear is of losing their jobs due to cost cutting measures to reach a bottom line.

The second area that arose during coding of this answer became a sub-category of *Staffing* and was very unexpected. Many concerns were discussed about employing *Less Experienced Help*. This was not an area that I had thought of or expected to see become a sub-category, but the concerns over it came up repeatedly throughout the interviews (not always stemming from the same question, as we will see). Four out of ten Baltimore respondents mentioned this (with no mention of it by me or probing) and described their concerns. Curt, a 30 year veteran, discussed the situation and even offered a solution for newsroom management:

I think that there would be a way for news departments, news corporations, to streamline and to utilize their best people, do a little more multi-tasking with their best people so they could retain them, as opposed to just going for the cheapest available option, which is obviously somebody with little or no experience; probably the quality is going to suffer.

The concern stems from what participants described as a double edged sword. They are expected to do more and are stretched thin from layoffs, etc. but they are no longer able to rely on others in the newsroom. Many practitioner gaps are filled with inexpensive and inexperienced help that must have oversight. Whereas practitioners used to be able to concentrate on their own jobs and even do more beyond them, they now had to proofread scripts, check facts and assist in tasks that the inexperienced employee was not capable of completing alone.

By far the most commonly touched upon coding area was *Staffing Issues-Shrinking Staffs/Layoffs*.²⁴ While all ten described change, eight out of ten directly addressed shrinking staffs and the issues that follow when staffs get smaller.

PQ2: How long have you worked in broadcast news?

This was a general information question and cleared the way for further inquiry. Each participant's time spent in the news business is listed in the short participant biographies at the beginning of this chapter. The average amount of time spent in the broadcast news industry for the Baltimore participants was 24.6 years. Some participants had experience in print before making the move into broadcast, but that time was not counted in their experience in the industry.

PQ3: Are you familiar with deregulation?

This was another general information question used in order to gauge the participant's knowledge of the situation. I was quite surprised at how many practitioners described problems stemming from the FCC's rulings, but knew very little about the changing laws involving regulation. The most common answer to this question (five of ten) was some form of in between, such as, "yes, somewhat," or "a little." Only one participant described having no real understanding of deregulation or what it meant. Four of the ten answered "yes" and began describing what they thought the impact of deregulation/corporate ownership was. Of those who did not respond with their own

²⁴ Clearly, these were not yet categories and sub-categories at the time of coding. I am simply reflecting the reference of themes and concepts that later grew into categories and sub-categories.

thoughts, but answered “yes, somewhat” or a very similar response, I followed by asking what changes they thought came about from deregulation. Perhaps the clearest and most outspoken participant was Mitch, who described deregulation as a very negative decision:

I think that...that Congress did America a disservice by allowing media conglomerates. Um, they should have limited who can own a station, because all it is about is profits. It has nothing to do with anything else other than if a chain can, you know, gobble up “X” number of stations and can make it more efficient. I mean, it doesn’t serve the people at it in any way. If we had four news...if we had four stations in Baltimore that were owned by four local Baltimore owners, the news would look a lot different here.

This view was expanded upon by Leonard, who discussed story sharing, a trend that came about with corporate ownership pushing a central news orientation:

Well, I think number one, it married stations that wouldn’t normally be married. We’ll put stories on from Tampa that probably would have never made the air ten years ago. You know, but we’re kind of, we’re not required to, but we’re kind of pushed in that direction because it’s already on. So, you know, we kind of skew toward Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Kansas City sort of stories. But, we’re not really paying attention to what Baltimore viewers would necessarily want...if that makes any sense.

Only one participant acknowledged that he knew about and understood broadcast deregulation, but did not think that it had any negative effects on local television broadcast news. Interestingly, this same individual described many negative characteristics of deregulation/large corporate ownership. Perhaps, his understanding of deregulation was not sufficient to marry the two together. His understanding of deregulation revolved more around radio:

I've probably seen more effects of deregulation in radio, where you have Clear Channel and CBS that are drastically dominating the market with many stations. And, as a result of that, and it's probably economic, that you have hardly any people doing real news.

While this view of radio is accurate, it was not the view of the other participants that the complete elimination of news is the only effect of deregulation.

In terms of coding, those who elaborated on their answers touched most often on *Ownership-Non-Local*. Seven of ten discussed deregulation as being negative in some way and leading to effects detrimental to the newsroom.

PQ4: Have things changed in the newsroom over the last ten to fifteen years?

All ten participants in the Baltimore market responded "yes" to this question, so it was proceeded each time with the follow up question "how?" The answers to the question "how" were direct and given with confidence. Two very clear areas of change were described by the participants. One was philosophical and one was very tangible in terms of staff size and dollars spent. Each of the participants touched on these areas to some degree, with nearly all of them mentioning that the changes were not small, but major changes.

The first area of change described by the participants was in the area of shrinking staffs and shrinking budgets. Sheldon gave what became a rather common response to the question:

I think, uh, cutbacks, probably in staff, in, you know, dollars spent news gathering, whether it be equipment or people numbers. I think was obvious to us inside the building that it wasn't you know, it wasn't the same that it, the commitment what it once was.

Leonard further described the situation by offering specific examples of how budget and staff size affected the newsroom:

There are fewer local stories in the newscast. Um, they can fill it cheaply by taking stuff from CNN and ABC off the news feed. Whereas, you know, ten years ago, they were doing it with local packages, which basically, we have the, we try every day to fill an hour and a half newscast with three reporters...and it's almost impossible.

While most of those interviewed offered examples of what had changed in the newsroom, the more passionate response involved describing a change in philosophy. Sherrie, a reporter and investigative reporter, showed a great deal of disappointment in the way things have changed:

It has gone from the traditional, we're proud to be Edward R. Morrow, or, you know, reporting original and being true reporters to being more of a commercial enterprise...and more puffery and less substance.

Jack, an anchor/reporter, reflected on the change in the long view. While the question asked was about changes in the last ten to fifteen years, Jack discussed the pre-deregulation mindset of news management as opposed to now:

If you had a broadcast station, your news department lost money. Your sales department gained money. Now they're saying that news is a money maker. And back in the old days, that just, that wasn't even thought of. It was almost like "we're going to lose money, but darn it, it gives us local identification and public affairs programming on news and what not." So that philosophical change has flipped. That's gone 180.

In terms of coding, the most commonly touched upon areas were *News Philosophy* (Filling Space, Story Count), *Staffing* (Shrinking Staffs/Layoffs and Attrition), and *Money* (Cost Cutting). These areas were clear and noted nearly every time in each transcription.

PQ5: Has your job description changed?

Question number five was directly tied with number four. If things had changed in the newsroom, some of the job descriptions had likely changed as well. I wanted to gain an understanding of exactly what the difference was during a day at work for these news workers. Since not everyone who was interviewed had the same job (and many had switched positions recently) answers took a little more analysis and time to understand.

Ronald, a reporter, discussed how even the added role of working on the station's website had increased since he started doing it:

For example, the story I did today. I basically transcribed that and put it, and posted it to the web, which is, you know, no big deal, but it just takes time. And then, um, then they changed the rules. They want us to pick up maybe one or two extra stories, like off the wire, and post them on the web because they want to, you know, keep generating ad turning over content. My old station always had dedicated people that did nothing but post to the web. But now, in order to save money, it's just another part of my job to add it onto the web.

Those interviewees who were reporters all mentioned what was (at the time of the interviews) on the way, which would make for a major change in job description. This was in the area of solo reporting (often called "one man banding," "backpack journalism"

or “multimedia reporting”). This clearly was causing a great deal of anxiety and was seen as a major job description change. Most reporters were used to having a camera operator (photographer or “photog”) and a person back at the station to help edit. To report, write, shoot and edit a story alone requires a considerable amount of work and a complete shift of responsibility and attention. Brenda described the coming changes in her job description and daily routine:

They’ve already told us that one man bands are coming. And that’s something that I never thought I would have to deal with in Baltimore. Even when I was in Erie, Pennsylvania, Market 142, I wasn’t a one man band. But, I guess this is the new world. And in the new world of big business, um, they want to make more money. And the best way to make more money is to get, you know, fewer people to do more work.

Mitch, also a reporter, described how the downturn in the economy and struggle for advertising dollars had actually helped the reporters stave off this monumental shift in job duties:

We haven’t seen the biggest changes yet. The biggest change is going to be when one man bands are more prevalent in large markets. The bad economy has helped us in one aspect in that they do not have the money to turn us into one man bands because it would take a huge investment in cameras and editors and technical support to make it happen.

Larry, a reporter, described how additions to job responsibilities were commonly handled:

Corporate has these little, like, I almost want to call them jingles, because they change your job title and make you think that

you're...you know, just so that you know you have more responsibilities. I mean, there's no pay increase or anything like that. The change to solo reporting was, by far, the biggest noted change and the one causing the most concern, perhaps because it was so unknown at the time (some of these reporters are actually solo reporting now). Added duties did not seem to bother the news workers as much as having to pick up slack for smaller staffs and cover for inexperienced workers. It was the larger shifts in responsibility that those interviewed described as the biggest changes to job descriptions.

The most common coding areas touched upon were *Job Satisfaction* (Workload, More With Less) and *Staffing*. Nine of ten participants described having extra duties in some area that had become a part of the job description. The most common area was adding stories to the station website.

PQ6: What is your daily work routine like?

This question and Practitioner Question #7 (Is that routine the same as it's always been?) were in place to set up question number 8 (are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?). All practitioners described the basic current work routine for their particular jobs. All ten had, at a minimum, slight differences due to varying shifts, different positions and different areas of focus (for example, an investigative reporter had a much different day than a general assignment reporter). Each of the ten mentioned a staff meeting and a time of day when they did some work with the station website and none of them mentioned a break time (this did not necessarily mean they did

not get breaks, but they did not see them as important enough elements of their day to describe in their daily work routine).

PQ7: Is that routine the same as it's always been?

Once again, this varied. Many had switched positions, or moved to different positions within the newsroom. Each did mention that the added web element was new. In that sense all ten described a change to routine. The most common answer was that the routine varied (six of ten responded this way without probing). Respondents described long periods of time when certain positions (reporters, photographers, etc.) were understaffed and any sort of routine was thrown out the window. Ronald described one such period:

There was a time they were so short handed on people here and the corporate would not allow them to hire any more people. You would have two reporters covering the city of Baltimore. The reporters, we had to do two stories per day on totally different topics. So, there might be days that I would start out in the city, then have to go to up to Harford County, and then try to put, rush to gather two stories, one for 5:00 and one for 6:00. And I think the overall quality suffers. You get frustrated. You don't get to eat. Now that it's calmed a little bit, we're back to doing one story, but also there's the internet component too.

Steve, a photographer, described how his routine had changed due to added responsibilities in the field. He said that technology was supposed to make up for the added job duties, but did not:

I think, you know, I don't think one person can do the jobs of two in this instance successfully. I think it's more like one and a half. You

know what I mean? Because, at least from my experience, as kind of acting as a field producer while I'm shooting, you know, I know I'm going to forget things. Um, I know that I can't watch out for myself all of the time. And when you're talking about crime reporting or something, that's something that's kind of important.

The overall finding on this appeared to be that there were rarely set routines, but temporary ones that practitioners got into based on the ever-changing size of the newsroom staff. The descriptions of these changing routines showed a great deal of frustration. What Ronald and others did not describe was who picked up the slack for the internet component at times when reporters (or other news workers) were short handed and had extra tasks to complete.

Clearly, in terms of coding, this question was dominated by *Staffing* and *Job Satisfaction-workload*. Based on the responses, it was almost normal to have an abnormal staffing.

PQ8: Are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?

I purposely held back on probing in PQ6 and PQ7 so that the respondents would offer fresh answers to this question. Eight out of ten practitioners responded flatly that they were doing more work. The reasons for this were a combination of added job responsibilities, more shows and/or downsized staff. Sheldon, a sports anchor/reporter turned multimedia contributor, described the situation in his sports department shortly before he left (four months prior to the interview):

In the end it got frustrating because I lost a full time producer who got reduced to a half time producer. And there were a lot of days where I was the department, which meant you know, there's a

Ravens' workout in the morning, I'm still doing the 11:00 show and leaving there at 1:00a.m. And, you know, you're turning in a fifteen hour day for a two minute sportscast sometimes.

While increased workload was the common response, Curt, a producer, said that the increase had been tempered by union protection:

I work at a station now that's union. I've worked at stations that are not union. Yes, absolutely. If you're a non-union station, you can bet that they're asking you to do more. They're asking you to work hours. They're asking you to multi-task more, whether it's post the web, etc. ,etc, but obviously union stations, there's still a little more, you know, concern about overtime and things like that.

Brenda, a reporter, was the only person interviewed who said that she was actually doing less work:

It's actually gotten easier as of late, because when I first came to this station, all of three years ago, the reporters had to do two stories a day. So, they'd have one story in one county and then a completely different story in another county. It was really hectic, a lot of driving, a lot of stressing out. But, we have new management now and they've kind of decided to let us just focus on one story a day.

This reduction in workload was described as temporary, however, while the station implemented the solo reporting requirement. While reporters would report one story each day, instead of two, they would soon have to shoot and edit their own material. This was an area of great concern for Brenda.

In terms of coding, the most commonly discovered areas were clearly *Job Satisfaction* (workload, time issues, more with less), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs) and *Money* (cost cutting). While some pointed out that they enjoyed their work and wanted to

be involved in every aspect of a show, they did confirm that they were doing more than in the past.

PQ9: How many hours of news programming does your station do each day? Was it always this number?

This question clearly grew hand in hand with the question that followed regarding newsroom staff size. The average number of hours each station spent on news programming each day was five. Five participants worked in stations that had 5.5 hours of news each day and five worked in stations with 4.5. As mentioned in chapter four, this number had increased over time. While all had been at their particular stations for different amounts of time, seven of ten said they saw increases in the number of shows the station did on a daily basis. The average amount of time in this increase was one hour (generally two half hour shows, or one full hour long show). This figure was only partially useful (a 20 year veteran of a station might have seen the number of newscasts doubled, while a three year veteran of a station might have seen no change at all). Nobody said their station had decreased the number of shows and seven said they increased. That was the important number going forward into the next question.

PQ10: Is the newsroom staff you work with the same size as the one you've always worked with?

Seven of ten responded that the newsroom staff they worked with was smaller than when they started. This, coupled with the fact that all of the stations had maintained or increased the number of shows they were doing, was very significant. Even a

newsroom staff that has not changed develops an obvious increase in workload with more shows and no new people. For several of the respondents, this change was significant.

Leonard, a former producer and new web coordinator, described the situation at his station:

Oh, the newsroom staff has shrunk, it's down to bare minimums, Uh, you know, we used to have writers. We don't have any anymore. I mean now the producer writes the stuff. That's just the way it's got to be. Uh, in fact, and very funny, this just shows you kind of the disconnect between consultants and what actually happens on the ground. A consultant came in and said "The producers needed to write nothing but teases," not knowing that we didn't have any writers.

Others described the reduction in news staff as a slow process, by which people left and were not replaced for a long time, or at all. This was not an uncommon practice. One participant described the situation as a combination of layoffs and workers not being replaced after leaving. She added that her station was currently in last place in the ratings. Throughout the interviews this topic of last place came up in various areas. The common belief among ownership appeared to be that if a station was last in the ratings, the news operation could be run more cheaply because it could not sink any lower.

Another reporter described the complete elimination of positions and even a department. Sherrie is an investigative reporter:

Um, there are, oh, less people. You know, I used to have the I-Team and we had specialty reporters and we had beats and we had some producers working to help them in doing the research and that's all gone away.

The three who did not mention a reduction in staffing all came from the same station. Interestingly, one participant, Steve, said that the station had always worked with a smaller staff than other newsrooms. He described a situation whereby the staff was smaller and always had been:

That's kind of always been the business plan from the beginning. And that, our, you know, we get paid less and we work twice as hard. That's kind of the way it works. And you know, you accept that when you come to work where I do.

Regardless of whether or not newsroom staffs were decreased in actual size, they had virtually become smaller. When stations increase the number of newscasts, they increase revenue through advertising dollars and one would expect them to add producers, photographers, etc. to the new newscast. By keeping the staff the same size and increasing the number of shows, stations were actually decreasing the number of practitioners available to work on the shows.

In terms of coding for this question, the most commonly coded areas were *Staffing* (all sub-categories), *Money* (cost cutting, profit margins), and *Job Satisfaction* (more with less, workload).

PQ11: Does your station have a “brand” of news? Who decides what it is?

A news “brand” is a motto or slogan that describes the focus of a station. *Eyewitness News*, *Works for You and Live, Local, Late-Breaking* are all examples of news brands. For example, a station that has a brand of *Taking Action for You*, might focus on consumer advocacy and helping the viewers get justice, etc. Eight out of the ten participants in the Baltimore market responded that they had a station brand. One did not

know. Interestingly, one interviewee said that his station did not have a brand, but this was contradicted by two others from the same station who described their brand as *Live, Local Late-Breaking*. Based on posting on the station website, it appears that the station did have a brand and this individual was not aware of it.

Among those who answered yes to the first part of the question, five responded that it was corporate consultants who decided what the brand was and one said that it was corporate ownership itself that decided. Two of the respondents did not know who made that decision. The responses to questions regarding out of town consultants (who are actually hired by the corporate owners and consult for the entire conglomerate) were not positive at all. Sarcastic comments followed by negative stories were common. This was heard in Jack's scoffing response:

Uhh, consultants. Consultants and management. For better, or worse. Consultants.

Brenda described how the branding process was supposed to work:

The consultants say that our brand is "Works for You" and they have been trying to push it. I guess it's, you know, like a consumer advocate kind of thing. If people have problems. They should call us and we're going to fix it. We work for you. So, that's fine, but I don't think if you went out and you know, polled people in Baltimore, I don't think they would know that was our brand.

Leonard was very outspoken in describing his frustration with consultants from out of town telling his newsroom/sports department how they can and should operate:

It's all corporate. It's all corporate sponsors. Um, but you know, that's probably the area that is affected most by these corporate takeovers. In markets like Baltimore, Philadelphia and you know, Boston and Baltimore you can really, you can lead a newscast with

sports and people will not be offended by it, just because it's a different thing. But the corporate research and the consultants will tell you that you cannot lead a newscast with sports. You just can't do it.

In terms of how that decision was put into motion (**PQ12**), the question was most often skipped, because those who said that they knew what the station brand was, and who decided it, actually went straight into the description of how it was put into place. Brenda described the routine of consultants coming into a process that news workers were used to:

Every few months they show up and they do what they do and then they leave, you know.

When asked if the station takes their input seriously, she responded:

They certainly seem to.

In terms of coding for the questions on branding (10 and 11), the most coded concepts were *Ownership* (non-local), *Consultants* and *Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots). No participants mentioned that the decisions were made in house (except Jack who briefly mentioned management working with the consultants). Clearly, the findings show that decisions made regarding how the station was to approach news came from an outside source, hired by the ownership group.

PQ13: How independent are you in terms of making decisions? Constraints? From whom? (If less autonomy why?)

This question yielded some interesting results. Six out of ten said that they were not happy with their degree of autonomy. These six were adamant that they were not free

in terms of making decisions. The fault, they said, lied in a system that was put in place from top management. Mitch explained where he thought the constraints came from:

No. There is no autonomy. He (the News Director) manages to keep the profits going and as long as he is keeping things, uh, the profits flowing, New York is happy with him. The corporation does not care what goes on the air here as long as they're not sued and the profits keep being shoveled into their accounts. They could care less about the tone of the local news or what we cover. Not even on their list of concerns.

Leonard described the situation as being a more subtle way of the corporate bosses getting the types of stories they wanted:

You are constantly being judged on your numbers and your story count. And unless your decisions lead to higher ratings growth, then you'd better do what the consultants say or that can lead to a job issue, job security issue. They'll never tell you to take this story down off the website or yada, yada, yada, but you know, they will say, "well, why weren't your numbers up this month? What kind of stories did you have?" and they'll kind of do a re-creation history.

As mentioned, this was not an across the board opinion, however. Of the four who said they were independent and happy with their degree of autonomy, three came from the same station. Those participants described being happy with their level of autonomy and discussed it as a reason they have stayed where they are and said it was the best part of their job. Jack talked about why he left another station (and took a pay cut) to take the job where he was now:

Yeah, because of my experience writing...I love to write. To me, it's the most enjoyable part of my job is writing. I love to write. That's why I like finding stories about the record guys and fainting

goats and stuff. But, um, in other places, they wouldn't allow you to do that. You know, since again, it's just the view of you know, you're just an anchor. You spray the hair, get the teeth bleached.

Jake, who was from the same station as Jack, gave a very similar answer and description of why things were better where he worked:

In talking to my colleagues at other stations, there's a little more flexibility here, and we are encouraged to attend the news meetings. Reporters at other stations, you know, they sit in, sometimes they're looked at like, well, "why would you be here? We're going to decide what you cover." So, I think there's more of a frustration with that at other stations than at our station.

In terms of coding, the categories most often coded for question 13 were *Job Satisfaction* (disillusionment, happiness), *Ownership* (non-local), *Hierarchy* (bosses answer to bosses) and *News Philosophy* (cultivation of style and brand). It is notable in these findings that those who were not satisfied with their independence, in terms of making decisions, pointed to the corporate hierarchy and three of four who were happy with their independence/autonomy were from the same station. That station was Baltimore's only locally owned station.

PQ14: Are you happy with this degree of autonomy? Does it offend your journalistic morality in some way?

This was a question that was asked of those who answered yes to **PQ13**. Of the six who were asked this question, all six said that they were offended in terms of their journalistic morality because of a changed business. Ronald answered with the typical mindset of those who said they were not autonomous and offended journalistically:

Yeah. But unfortunately it just seems to be a reality anymore. I mean I, it's not like I have given up or anything like that, but it just seems to be, it just seems to be a reality that the stations do. I mean, it's a corporate business. And there are goals that they have to set. And those goals don't always agree with my integrity. But you have to understand, I have a mortgage. I have to eat. And you know, so I have to take what victories I can when I get them.

Sherri responded that this lack of autonomy had changed the very importance of her role as a broadcast journalist.

Oh yeah. Totally, because I've always really believed that that was the check and balance in society. And, I have, I just strongly believe that...there have been times over the years where it had an effect. Where the laws were changed or you know people learned about things they needed to know. Where government was, you know, challenged or it's largess or whatever and unfortunately, that is just not happening anymore.

While those who responded were clearly disappointed in the situation, it should be noted that all of the respondents gave answers that showed they thought their jobs had changed permanently for the worse.

In terms of coding, this area was dominated by *Job Satisfaction* (disillusionment) and *Hierarchy* (who's calling shots).

PQ15: What is the structure of supervision for your particular job?

See Appendix A. This question was used as a reference to help verify the hierarchical structure that is used in newsrooms. All participants described their situation by explaining who their immediate boss was, followed by explanation of the basic chain

of command. The only anomalies to speak of came as answers to other questions when some participants questioned the authority of certain managers and suggested that someone higher up was in-fact making the rules.

PQ16: Are you satisfied with the amount of information you are able to deliver to the public?

Seven out of ten responded that they were NOT satisfied with the amount of information they were able to deliver to the public. Responses to this question were usually followed with a clarifying statement that separated story count and actual content. Most who said they were dissatisfied added that it was the high story count requirements in newscasts that was causing important stories to be given shorter air time. Therefore, while the number of stories in the show might be high, the amount of information that they considered to be important was low. Leonard explained the response of many participants very well:

Well, I think it probably happened, probably about five years ago. At least in my experience. And I think kind of what happened was, is that the um, I think that corporate America saw shows like the Today Show and Good Morning America and looked at the newscast as someplace where there could be greater opportunity to make revenue.

Leonard was referring to the high story count and fast pace of newscasts that allowed stations to target certain demographics and, in turn, advertisers.

Brenda, who had shown great unhappiness in previous responses, added that she was not happy with the amount of information she was able to deliver to the public in her story assignments:

It's a little more business-driven. It's a little more scandal-driven than I thought. And so therefore, I don't always feel good about what I was asked to do that day. And usually, that's confirmed when I go out to the real world and you know, my mechanic complains to me for two hours about how much he can't stand to watch the news.

Two of the three who responded yes to this question worked at the city's only locally owned station. This is important to note, because they usually mentioned this in their responses by comparison with other stations. Steve, a photographer, described his surprise when given more time than he was accustomed to for a story:

At my very first week at this job I have now, I was sent out to go field produce, shoot, write, edit a natural sound piece. And I went into the producer and I asked her, "I said how long, you know, how long will you give me? What do I have?" And she said, "take as much time as you need." And we're talking about story line. And that blew me away because I've never been in that position.

Normally it's been, it's a buck-ten.²⁵ You have to fit whatever information you have into this little square, you know, little block of time. Our place, you know, and again, we're not the norm, but we do a long form story every night.

Stories like Steve's were rare, however, and, as shown, most participants described newsroom situations with high story count and less minimal leverage for telling a longer story that the reporter found satisfactory.

²⁵ Newsroom slang for one minute-ten seconds.

Coding for this section brought the most highlights in the areas of *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *News Philosophy/Style* (story count, filling space), *Money* (changing mindset about profits).

PQ17: Do you feel a sense of responsibility to the public?

Response to this question was an across the board YES. All ten practitioners said that they felt a responsibility to the public. Interestingly, the comments about why they felt this way varied. Based on the responses it was clear that all of those interviewed felt a sense of responsibility to the public, but they wrestled with certain limitations. Mitch talked about how he had to do what he thought was right within the limitations of his job:

Well, I think that's two questions. Do I feel a sense of responsibility to the public? Um, more so than to my boss. I need to keep my boss happy. I have the thing called the "Wheel of Trust," which basically, who do I affect and who affects me and to me, the viewers are the most important. But, I have to be able to please them within the framework of pleasing my boss.

Ronald talked about telling the truth to the public and how what is really the truth might get pushed aside for the structure of news put in place by ownership, management, etc.:

I think we miss things. I think a lot of things wind up getting buried in bullshit. And I think that, I think we maybe miss some things because if we're, if we're already following in the corporate path of you know, we need this, we need to build a Monica, we need to appeal to certain areas or stuff like that, I think we are missing things. If we're ignoring news of the day, we're ignoring something that's a community issue in favor of uh, you know, Britney Spears

is pregnant again or something like that, there's a problem with that, you know?

Others cited a connection with the public and the sense of responsibility to what goes out to the public as their main reasons for remaining in the business. Most touched on (but, not always with a direct response to this question) a view that corporate ownership did not share that sense of responsibility.

Coding the responses for this question revolved heavily around *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *News Philosophy/Style* (story count, cultivation of style and brand), *Money–Profit Margins* (changing mindset about profits). Clearly, these areas of coding are similar to the ones stemming from the previous question as the elaboration of comments fell along the same lines.

PQ18: What is morale like in the newsroom?

Eight out of ten participants answered that morale was low or at an all-time low. The reasons for low morale could be a study in itself, but the practitioners offered their views as to why morale was low at the time of the interview. Six of eight who said morale was low explained that it was caused by decisions being made about the newscast, staffing issues and cost-cutting. These decisions, they said, caused stress, fear, frustration and general disillusionment. Leonard said that morale was lower than it had ever been:

Morale, you know, just in, in the tank. You know, they, the company wants more and more and wants to compensate you less and less.

Jake suggested that recent layoffs had caused concern and stress throughout the newsroom:

Morale is not the greatest right now because of when you, a couple of people that have been laid off and all up and down the financial food chain. That is unsettling because, you know, there was a time when the people that got laid off for the last time were freelancers or part-timers.

Two of those who commented that morale was low, said that it was nothing new. Morale, they said, was never very high in any newsroom and that it is a product of the business. Mitch joked that it is typical to have low morale:

It's never been hot. I mean, I've never worked in a news room yet that had good morale. I think the nature of what we do, we're both open minded and cynical. And the sky is always falling in the newsroom.

This ran counter to the others who described what had affected morale and comments from those very experienced practitioners like Ronald, who stressed that morale was recently “just at an all time low.”

Once again, the two who said that morale was good were from the same locally owned station. They seemed to be aware that their situation was not like others in the business:

I think here, it's excellent. That was another reason I came back. There's a lot of people who left here, including myself, and then came back. You know, the grass is always greener.

Obviously, coding around this question centered on what became the sub-category of *Job Satisfaction*, which is called morale, and all of its own sub-categories (stress/pressure, burnout, disillusionment, happiness). There was also significant coding related to workload, time issues and *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/layoffs). In terms of coding

and developing concepts into categories, morale as a sub-category and all of its corresponding sub-categories were very clear.

PQ19: Do you like your job as much as you did at first?

This question resulted in one of the most interesting set of responses in the study. Four responded adamantly “no,” four responded “yes,” and two responded that they were on the fence and offered some kind of clarifying answer. Interestingly, as we saw previously, three of the four who said they liked their job as much as they did when they started worked for the same locally owned station. Those who said that they liked it as much spoke of the job itself and the excitement that it brought, such as Jack:

I love the idea of starting out every day not knowing what the hell I’m going to say. And at the end of the day, it’s over. The product, good, bad, indifferent. I like to start out with a product that is fresh in the morning, done at the end of the day, and then the board is erased and you start the very next day with something completely different.

This view of not having a normal nine to five job was shared by two others who still liked their jobs as much as they did in the beginning.

On the opposite end of the spectrum were those who said they did not like their jobs as much. Three out of four mentioned added new duties as a main reason for this frustration. Neither of the females still liked their jobs as much as previously and many comments were made about the changing landscape of the business as reasons for no longer liking it. Brenda was very clear about dissatisfaction:

I didn’t go to school to become a photographer. Um, I knew that I sucked at being a photographer and I thought that I had escaped it.

So, one, they're asking me to take on a job title that I didn't plan on. And also it kind of proves to me that this is a business and at the end it's all about money. And that slowly but surely, things are going to continue to change, until, personally, I think, it's an industry for people under thirty. And they're going to just cycle us out as we get burned out.

There were two participants who did not give clear answers to this question.

Mitch, a longtime reporter, said that he liked what he did, but not because of what is going on in the newsroom (he had many complaints otherwise). Mitch described one of the reasons he still liked being involved in news:

I think part of that is because I'm involved in the National Press Photographers Association and I, I am constantly exposed to work with some of the best storytellers in the world. When you are constantly exposed to really well-told stories, you aspire to do as good as they do. And, so every day is a challenge.

Neither Mitch nor Leonard gave a straight yes or no to this question, but explained the things they liked about working in news. Neither of them described their actual job as the reason for liking the business as much as they used to. For this reason it could not be determined which category their responses fit into.

PQ20: Would you enter the business now if you were fresh out of college-knowing what you know?

This question clearly goes along with PQ19. The results were similar with only a slight variance. Six participants said they would not go into the business again if they were fresh out of college; three said they would and one responded "maybe." With the exception of the producer who said maybe, all of the respondents were quite sure of their

position on this question. Of those who responded negatively, all cited concerns for where the business of local broadcast news is headed and wondered if there even was a future for it. Sheldon, a sports anchor/reporter and web producer, reflected on how he felt the sports department was being treated by the corporate management:

I think, being in sports...if I was in news, it might be a little different. But, the feeling in there is, "if we don't squash you today, we're going to squash you tomorrow probably." And they don't say it right to your face, but you feel it. You know, you feel like, at least in our building, that you know, it really didn't matter a whole bunch.

Brenda continued to describe her dissatisfaction with the state of the broadcast news business and her newsroom especially. After responding "no" to the question, Brenda explained how she thought she and those who do what she does were treated:

As a reporter, I kind of feel like, I call myself the mule of the newsroom. And now, there are a lot of mules in the newsroom in all facets. But, unless you're management, you're not controlling your own destiny. And you know, maybe I kind of resent that as I'm getting older.

Once again, two of the three who responded "yes" to this question were from the only locally owned station represented. They remained excited about the business and their jobs. Mike responded to the question with an answer of "yes, absolutely." He went on to explain that being able to do what he does keeps him excited:

It's fun. It's like licking your finger and sticking it in the socket every day. When things are going well, or when things are going poorly, you somehow manage to make it go well, it's a huge release of adrenalin.

One of those who previously said that he still liked his job was on the fence about whether he would go into the business knowing what he knows now. Jack cited the changing nature of the business and added competition among his concerns:

Oh man, is that a good question. I don't know. I've got to be honest with you. Um, I've thought about that a lot. It's, I think it's a lot tougher for kids today to get into the business. There's so much competition. So, I don't know. It still is a very exciting business and God knows where it's going to go. If I was, I think I'd be focused on the internet.

For the most part, those who responded yes to PQ19 also responded the same way to PQ20, with the exception of Jack, who switched to an unsure stance. The two who remained on the fence regarding PQ19 moved to the no category for PQ20.

In terms of coding questions 19 and 20, many categories were represented. Among those are, *Job Satisfaction* (disillusionment, burnout, happiness), *News Philosophy/Style* (growing competition), *Management, and Technology* (internet). While this was one of the tougher areas of the transcriptions to code, these questions did help to solidify categories and sub-categories because of the wide range of answers.

Further Findings-Baltimore

Traditional Journalism as Reward

Throughout the analysis of the findings to particular questions, there were discoveries that came from probing questions or open comments made by the participants that did not fit into the initial categories. These came as a surprise in many cases. As with

all open coding, when these comments were frequent they became concepts and then fit into other areas that became categories, sub-categories, etc. One such area I am calling Traditional Journalism as Reward. I found this in all three markets, but it was in coding the Baltimore market that it stood out most. An explanation of this would be a practitioner being rewarded by reporting a story or taking part in a special situation that had many elements of traditional journalism. These rewards varied by station, but were found in each market. It is interesting that traditional news style and values were seen as rewards. They promoted good morale and some even said that they were among the few things that motivated them.

Of the three Baltimore participants who work at the locally owned station (WBFF) all three mentioned the “cover story” as something that they look forward to.

Jake explained:

We also have a daily cover story, which may run about four to five minutes. And that’s unlike the other stations. The other stations, during ratings periods, will have so-called cover stories, but that may only be for the month of November, February and May. So, this is something that we’ve started.

Steve, a photographer, also mentioned the cover story:

You know, so, in those cases, when you’re doing long form, yeah, you know, you feel like you’re satisfied, you’re getting everything out there that needs to be told. But again, we are the exception.

Others mentioned having a special web piece that is longer, or a special individualized project that they are able to work on. Each of these special pieces involved three elements: Help, time and independence, all things that many of the participants complained about not having on a regular basis. Not every station had such rewards, but

those that offered them were mentioned frequently. Jack (from the same station) called it “throwing a bone.” Those who worked in stations that offer such opportunity said that it promoted healthy competition and gave practitioners something to aspire and look forward to.

Coding for this information became part of *Job Satisfaction* (Morale-Happiness). It was notable that simple, traditional broadcast news elements promoted so much positive comment.

Corporate Ownership

A complete disdain for corporate ownership and its practices with local news was prevalent throughout the interviews. Some of the participants sidetracked and told stories of corporate indifference, while others provided very long answers to questions or probes that gave clarity for their unhappiness. Sheldon wondered if his bosses were even a party to certain decisions:

I think our station is very much corporate driven and uh, I’m really not sure how much the news director and even the general manager have to say in big decisions. I think it’s corporate-driven out of Cincinnati. That’s Scripps Howard’s base.

Even the locally owned station in Baltimore was actually part of a large media conglomerate. It just so happens that Baltimore was its home base. As we have seen throughout the interview process, the news workers liked this local ownership very much. Mitch (from another station) shared his opinion regarding how the locally owned station operated:

There is only one station in Baltimore that is locally owned and that station does a better job covering our area than their other stations do covering their areas. They put money into their local operation because the local owners have to answer to their...their friends. In the areas where they own stations in other markets, they don't care what they're doing. They just want to see the numbers. And I think that's immoral.

Others also described their situation as being immoral for various reasons.

Leonard talked of practices in his newsroom during the previous five years as something the audience was not completely informed of:

Um, you know, we did medical stories constantly with our medical sponsors. And I'm not sure that was ever adequately, I guess you know, pointed out to the viewer.

Sherrie described the pressure to turn stories in quickly and fill time with minimum staff as causing routine plagiarism:

For example, what I was saying, calling everything investigative, but it might have been about a survey out of a magazine. We're all just stealing other people's news all the time without crediting them.

These concerns and complaints were common, even among those who said they still like their jobs.

The coding was very difficult and slow to develop, because there were often comments that did not relate directly to the standard questions, but were revealed during probing or volunteered comments. In terms of coding, the concepts found in these comments fell into the coding areas that became *Ownership* (non-local), *Management* (hierarchy-bosses answer to bosses), *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *Job*

satisfaction (morale-stress/pressure, disillusionment), *Money* (profit margins-growing bottom line). They were valuable in the categorization of the data.

Chapter Six:
Pittsburgh Market Findings

Pittsburgh is media market #23. It consists of four stations that air news, but only three stations actually produce it. The oldest of these stations is the well known KDKA TV. The station is the city's CBS affiliate and is owned and operated by the network. The station follows the brand *Your Home for Local News*.

The city's second oldest station is WPXI-TV. The station is owned by Cox Enterprises. The station follows the *News You Can Count On* brand. WPXI also produces news for the Sinclair owned WPGH-TV (FOX) in Pittsburgh and also airs on PCNC (Pittsburgh Cable News Channel). At the time of the interviews, Cox Enterprises owned 15 television stations nationwide.

WTAE-TV began airing on September 14, 1958. The station is the city's ABC affiliate and is owned by Hearst Television Inc. The station follows the *Action News/Taking Action For You* brand. Full disclosure-WTAE is my former employer. However, I had been gone for seven years before the interviews began and was not familiar with the activities at the station. Hearst Television Inc. owned 29 television stations across the United States at the time of the interviews.

WPGH is Pittsburgh's FOX news affiliate. The station began a news operation in 1996, but laid-off all of its workers and began outsourcing its news to WPXI-TV. Due to the fact that WPGH does not produce its own news, I did not interview anyone from the station. Some of the on-air personalities that appear on their outsourced news, however,

were part of my interviews with practitioners at WPXI-TV. At the time of the interviews Sinclair Broadcast Group owned 60 television stations across the country.

(Sources: <http://pittsburgh.cbslocal.com/station/kdka-tv/>, www.wpxi.com, www.wtae.com, www.wpgh53.com, www.stationindex.com, and participant interviews).

Participants

Robert is a 24 year veteran of broadcast news. He works as an assignment editor and has spent his entire career at his current station, beginning as a desk assistant. Ronald says that breaking news is his favorite part of the business and that he still gets a rush from being a part of it. I interviewed Robert on August 22, 2007 via telephone. The interview lasted 49 minutes.

David is a 34 year veteran of broadcast news. In that time he has worked in radio and television and served as an on-air anchor/reporter and is now an assignment editor. I interviewed David on August 23, 2007 via telephone. The interview lasted 71 minutes.

Whitney is a 16 year veteran of broadcast news. She is a multi-award winning anchor/reporter. I interviewed Whitney in her station's newsroom on March 14, 2008. The interview lasted 51 minutes.

Patrick is a 27 year veteran of broadcast news and currently works as a director. I interviewed Patrick in a private conference room at his station in Pittsburgh on March 15, 2008. The interview lasted 53 minutes (not including a tour of new facilities and equipment).

Lance is a 31 year veteran of broadcast news. Lance prides himself on shooting outstanding video and is well known in the market. I interviewed Lance in a private conference room at his station in Pittsburgh on March 15, 2008. The interview lasted 50 minutes.

Candi is a 23 year veteran of broadcast news and has been a producer for more than a decade. I interviewed Candi in a private conference room at her station in Pittsburgh on March 15, 2008. The interview lasted 44 minutes.

Kathy is a 28 year veteran of broadcast news. Kathy has proudly, at one time or another, produced every show that the station airs. I interviewed Kathy via telephone on June 11, 2008. The interview lasted 78 minutes.

Donald is an anchor and 27 year veteran of broadcast news. I interviewed Donald via telephone on July 7, 2008. The interview lasted 45 minutes.

Bob is a 15 year veteran of broadcast news. He currently works as an assignment editor. I interviewed Bob via telephone on July 8, 2008. The interview lasted 44 minutes.

Adrienne is a 33 year veteran of broadcast news. She currently works as an assignment editor and special projects producer. I interviewed Adrienne on October 20, 2008. The interview lasted 47 minutes.

Results-Pittsburgh

PQ1: What's going on in broadcast news?

The clear response to this question in the Pittsburgh market involved change and new technology. All ten of the participants described change in some way. At the time of the interviews, each station was preparing for the change to High Definition (HD) and a certain amount of anxiety was expressed about adding new technology to an already changing technological field. However, the biggest concerns were the demand for immediacy in news and the shrinking news staffs. Patrick, a director, described his view of the current state of the broadcast news business:

Consolidation. That's all it is. Stations buying up stations. One station doing a show for another station. We do it here. We do it for channel 53 here. We've done it for a little over a year. Um, because it's all about cutting costs, saving money, cutting people. People have become, people have become a liability in the business.

Because all, all the managers want to do is save the bottom line, make it look better, make more obscene profit than you can imagine.

Patrick was working for a station that produced its own news as well as news for another station. He was one of the most senior directors and had a great deal of responsibility in programming a new automated control room system. Therefore, one might consider that

his take on the business was shaped by that pressure and frustration. However, other practitioners, from different stations, echoed a similar assessment. David, an assignment editor, expressed it this way:

I see we're doing more with less, in terms of personnel. Um we are down photographers and we are down editors, the people who we desperately need because we're doing more news on the air.

This pressure to produce quickly was shared by Lance, a photographer, from the same station:

My input is less pretty pictures, if you will, or content of, "That's a nice framed shot, that's a nice sequence." It's moved away from that to basically being technically advised to, when on scene, getting a signal, a picture back to the station. That's my number one effort every day...to present the possibility of a live shot.

Several of the participants also mentioned that technology was playing a role in the change that they described. While stations were becoming more corporate, the audience was changing in its expectations. Candi described how technology is changing how news is done:

The society today is just, I want it. It want it now. I can't wait for it in two hours. Tell me what I need to know. I need to go about my business. If it's not on TV right now, I'll find another source for it, and so you have to satisfy the hunger.

On the whole, the way the participants described it, changes in technology, combined with expectations of doing more with less have changed the way news is done. Smaller staffs, more news stories and an expectation for immediate news were hallmarks of broadcast news at this time.

The most coded areas from this first question were: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs), *Job satisfaction* (more with less), *Ownership* (non-local), *News Philosophy/Style* (24 hour news), *Money* (cost cutting), *Technology* (changes, internet/websites/blogging).

PQ2: How long have you worked in broadcast news?

This general information question cleared the way for further inquiry. The time each participant had spent in the news business is listed in the short participant biographies at the beginning of this chapter. The average amount of time participants spent in the broadcast news industry for the Pittsburgh participants was 25.8 years.

PQ3: Are you familiar with deregulation?

Eight out of ten responded to this question with “yes,” one responded “somewhat” and one was “unsure.” Those who responded “yes” were asked how they thought the changes had affected the newsroom. The overwhelming response revolved around size of staff and control. The most complete answers were offered by two producers. Since producers work with everyone on the news staff, they are most affected by changes that are made. Kathy explained that after producing for over 25 years, she now was losing some control due to deregulation:

We’re becoming a more sales-driven station. And there are days when I, you know, when they push for stories to be covered. I think that it’s more of a marketing tool, more so than news judgment. I guess it’s hard to explain that there are days where it doesn’t really seem that we’re really in control of the ball.

Candi, another producer, reflected on the size of staff and how sharing between stations leads to smaller news crews:

I think there's a lot of "piggy backing" now. You may have stations that are, you know, corporations that are owning so many stations these days. And there's, like, this transfer. There's a lot of sharing. Everything from graphics to even, you know, control rooms in some situations. And that leads to, probably, some downsizing. That I really think is probably the most obvious.

Whitney, an anchor who also writes and works with the producers, touched on some points that were made by several of the respondents regarding the reasons ownership continues to trim staff:

We've definitely shrunk. We definitely shrunk. The pressure has been cranked up. Competition here in this TV market, as you know, is so tight it's not even funny. Uh, no matter what. I think it's the tightest market in the U.S. And it's a challenge. It can be very aggravating. It can be rewarding, but you know, we're doing more with less and fewer resources, fewer people. But, you know, it's funny because, we always get it on TV. It always gets done, so until something falls flat on its face, it's not going to change.

Whitney's view that nothing will change until there is a disaster was shared by many and it is a fine example of what many practitioners said. In all, none of the respondents thought that deregulation was a good thing or led to positive change.

In terms of coding, the most commonly noted areas were: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs), *Job Satisfaction* (more with less), *Money* (meeting bottom line), *Ownership* (non-local), *Professionalism* (public responsibility).

PQ4: Have things changed in the newsroom over the last ten to fifteen years?

The response from all ten practitioners to this question was “yes.” The number one word used was undoubtedly “shrinking.” Nearly all of the participants described a newsroom that was continuously getting smaller while the number of newscasts increased or stayed the same. Robert explained that the lower the market rankings, the more the staff had to do:

Less staff, depending on your market size. The smaller the market, the less the money. So, the more people in the newsrooms do more. That’s where you have the newsrooms where you have an anchor who is also the News Director, who is also the 6:00 producer. Uh, and you have reporters who are working as slash-bureau, slash-producer, slash-assignment editors, because they don’t have the economic wherewithal to hire a full staff. Based on the market size, Pittsburgh being a shrinking market, less people in the newsroom. Everybody in this town is suffering from it.

[Pittsburgh, at market 23 had slipped since the late 1990’s when it was ranked at 19. Rank 23 was still considered a large market.]

Patrick described a myriad of problems from less money being spent on news. He argued that everything and everyone else was suffering because of it:

Everything is cheaper. Everything is about the bottom line. And it’s really affected the product. I mean the facts, the, the expertise in getting things done, the speed in getting things done because there’s not the experience that we used to have.

Patrick was critical of the fact that the Pittsburgh market was recruiting broadcast news personnel from much smaller markets, from which previously it had not been possible to make the jump to a large market like Pittsburgh.

Adrienne also touched on a commonly understood fact in newsrooms. In the world of television, news is relatively inexpensive to produce. She contended that it had become a money maker for ownership:

I think they felt they could make some money that way. Um, and the programs, they're not that expensive to produce. I think it's more the issue you can produce programs fairly efficiently. There's a way to make some money.

These themes ran throughout the responses: Smaller staffs, despite bigger revenue, inexperienced help and penny pinching at every turn. Not a single participant thought that there was no change or that things had changed for the better.

The coding tendencies were: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/attrition, less experienced help), *Money* (cost cutting, profit margins, growing bottom line, changing mindset about profits), *Job Satisfaction* (workload, more with less).

PQ5: Has your job description changed?

Eight out of ten said that their job description had changed and expanded. Two others said that their job description was pretty much the same, but that they were busier. Adrienne said that she didn't know how to respond to the question:

Um, I don't know. You know, I'm not sure that I have an answer for that, except that I find myself working harder...If that's possible.

While Adrienne said that she is working harder, I saw nothing in her statement (or those related to it) that equaled an affirmative answer, so I put her in the "no" column for PQ5. She could have identified new roles and responsibilities to account for her working harder, but she did not.

Participants who did respond that their actual job description had changed described roles that required multi-tasking and produced more material to manage (shots, stories, etc.). Whitney described an expanded set of responsibilities for her job as an anchor:

I'm producing, I'm writing, I'm you know, choosing video and picking what goes where and moving stuff. I do managing editing. I do, you know, content. I offer opinions that are often followed through on where we should go and how we should approach things. I mean, I definitely have a much more responsible role than I've ever had.

For Candi, her role as a producer involved a much wider description of duties than it once did:

We, here at this shop, are responsible for a lot more of our graphics-making on our own. We don't just write the words anymore. You know, there's a lot more to producing, other than staffing and writing a show, there's so many visuals.

Candi went on to mention that new angles and set images keep things interesting for the viewer, but that the responsibility to keep track of those things now fell on the producer, whereas it used to be left to directors.

Lance reiterated that the biggest change to his job description as a photographer is that it now revolves around speed and setting up shots quickly:

The concept is, "let's get this live picture up and running." That's the drive. The talent of whether I can frame a shot, color and all that stuff, I don't even use anymore. It very rarely comes into play. If you're going to be a purist in that, you'll get burned out. You'll get disappointed and you'll wind up coming into work every day just

ticked off because you're not allowed to do that anymore. There's no time. There's no platform for you to do that.

As for the coding: *Job Satisfaction* (workload, more with less, time issues).

Technology (changes), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs), *News Philosophy/Style* (filling space, story count) were the most noted.

PQ6: What is your daily work routine like?

This question and Practitioner Question #7 (Is that routine the same as it's always been?) were designed to set up question #8 (are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?). Each practitioner described the current work routine for his or her particular job. All ten had, at minimum, slight differences from each other due to varying shifts, different positions and different areas of focus (for example, an investigative reporter would have a much different day than a general assignment reporter). Seven of the ten mentioned attending a staff meeting and six had to set aside time to do some work with the station website (It should be noted that those working at WTAE TV had a centralized website in Minneapolis for all Hearst stations. While many still blogged and posted to the website, some of the website work moved to the central location). As in the previous market, none of the participants mentioned a break time.

PQ7: Is that routine the same as it's always been?

Responses here varied quite a bit. While all of the participants responded that their routines were different in some way, the reasons for that variance and the level of it

differed from position to position. Ronald said that routine was often in flux depending on vacations (of fellow staffers) and the size of the current staff.

David described the biggest change to the routine as the addition of integrating the website with the news coverage:

We do a pretty good job of it. As a result of that it requires more of an effort on the part of us at the desk and others to you know, get the information that we have on the air onto the website, especially on the weekends when there's no one on the website Saturday and Sunday in the station. That falls on our shoulders, those of us on the desk, to send the information to stories or post stories or capture the videos so the website is updated on Saturday and Sunday.

Overall, the findings suggest that many routines were not set, or there were several routines, depending on staffing and the time of year. Of the permanent changes to routines, added technological requirements (website, etc.) and making up for smaller staffs were the biggest ones.

Patrick described his role as a director as a completely different job than in previous years, due to the change in technology that required him to pre-program a show:

I'm not a director anymore. I'm a computer programmer. They call us night directors, but what I was trained to do and what I'm doing...are nothing, they're not even similar. I won't even call myself a director. I pre-program the news and then push two buttons.²⁶

The codings used for this question were: *Technology* (changes, internet/website blogging), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs), *News Philosophy/Style* (filling space).

²⁶ The station that Patrick works for also runs newscasts for another station. It has moved from a traditionally staffed control room to a fully automated one. While his job, as a director, is now completely different and he has a whole new daily routine, not every station has followed this path to automation.

PQ8: Are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?

Eight out of ten responded that they were doing more work than before. The two participants who did not say “yes” both responded that their jobs were completely different so they really could not say (Patrick, with the new automated directing system, was one of them). All eight others said that they were absolutely doing more work than before and in some cases, like Kathy, a great deal more:

I’m probably doing three times more work. There’s more responsibility. You’ve got a smaller staff, where you don’t have [enough], like during the week, we have one writer for 90 minutes. Like from 5:00 to 7:00. Uh, from 5:00 to 6:30, we have one writer, a producer and one writer. That’s a lot of work. You could use three writers.

Candi added that technology actually increased work during the daily routine:

More [work]. Presentation-wise, a little more. We deal with a system now, “Pathfire,” so you have to look at your video and then you have to create a list, and then you have to load your video into the list so your editor can edit the video off your list. They just add up. You know, you have the big vision for your show in mind and sometimes that’s hard to hand off to somebody. And maybe there isn’t somebody to hand off to. Everybody is doing their own nickel and diming. Technology is great, but sometimes it just takes a little bit more time to get everything done.

While producers, like Candi and Kathy, described more work due to increased smaller tasks and writing, the others described the increase in workload largely as dealing with a smaller staff and higher story count combination. Simply by chance, there were no full-time reporters among those interviewed in Pittsburgh (just anchors who sometimes

reported). Interviews with at least two reporters were planned, but fell through because of scheduling issues.

The coding for PQ8 largely revolved around: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs, less experienced help), *Technology* (changes), *News Philosophy/Style* (story count), *Money* (cost cutting), *Job Satisfaction* (more with less).

PQ9: How many hours of news programming does your station do each day? Was it always this number?

This question clearly went hand in hand with the question that followed regarding newsroom staff size. The average number of hours each station spent on news programming each day was 5.5 hours. Pittsburgh clearly produced a lot of news. During the period studied (2007-2008), WTAE produced 4.5 hours of live news each day. WPXI produced 4.5 hours of news each day, as well as 1.5 hours for its cable outlet (PCNC), and one hour for the FOX affiliate for which it provided news. KDKA produced 5.5 hours of live news and 1.5 hours for its cable outlet (WPCW). Six participants worked in stations that produced 4.5 hours of news each day and four worked in stations that produced seven. As mentioned in chapter four, this number has generally increased over time (nationwide). While all participants had been at their particular stations for different amounts of time, eight of ten said they had seen increases in the number of shows the station did on a daily basis. The average amount of the increase was two hours (largely due to one hour live shows). Nobody said his or her station had decreased the number of shows and eight said they had increased.

PQ10: Is the newsroom staff you work with the same size as the one you've always worked with?

Perhaps because the competition is high and the ratings are notably close, each station in Pittsburgh had added a considerable amount of live news during participants' careers. Six out of ten participants said that their newsroom staff (including control room operators, etc.) was smaller. Two said that it was about the same, despite the increased number of news programs, and two said that the newsroom staff had actually increased.

In terms of staff decreases, the comments were that there were not mass layoffs, but decreases through attrition, as Whitney pointed out:

People leave and they're not replaced. We have fewer reporters than we've had. We work with a real skeleton crew. Unfortunately, they [management] continue to get what we need to get on TV. Not without much angst and suffering and complaining and hair pulling and screaming. But it gets on and unfortunately, our product looks better than everybody else's. So, what's the incentive for management to increase the size of your staff?

David echoed the same thoughts, but added why he thought it was happening:

It's dictated by the bottom line. For whatever reasons, management has not filled positions, either due to people retiring or leaving. And as a result, you find yourself scrambling and uh, you know, it's kind of like, smoke and mirrors. You're just trying to get it done somehow.

Two said that their news crew had grown due to the number of shows produced (these were both practitioners from the station that produced news for the Sinclair owned WPGH). Interestingly, both of these experienced practitioners showed deep concerns

over the age and experience of the new additions to the staff. Adrienne said that she was not happy about them:

I think there's certainly a youth kick that's gone on for quite some time. And, uh, that's not a trend that I find especially comforting.

Adrienne went on to explain that these younger individuals lacked the necessary frame of reference to be working in a media market the size of Pittsburgh and called it “a disturbing trend.”

The most commonly coded areas for PQ10 were: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs, less experienced help), *Money* (cost cutting, meeting bottom line), *Job satisfaction* (more with less, time issues, workload).

PQ11: Does your station have a “brand” of news? Who decides what it is?

Seven out of ten in Pittsburgh responded “yes” to this question. Of those who responded “yes” (two were unsure), each responded that it was management or corporate owners (often mentioning both) that made the decision. Kathy described her station's brand:

Our brand, the branding of our station is “Channel 4 Action News, We're taking action for you.”

When asked who made the decision on the branding, Kathy responded with the following:

The branding is a decision made by our news director, your promotion department, even your sales department. And, you know, newscasts are news and information, but a newscast is also a business.

One participant, Bill, did not want to answer the question, indicating that I was somehow asking him to reveal confidential information:

I can't say for [my station] because that's kind of an "Inside Baseball" question that I don't really feel comfortable answering. I know just watching other stations I've been at...it comes from corporate on down. And with the input taken from consultants and the station management and newsroom management.

Those who responded to the question usually voluntarily answered without any follow-up. When I asked Whitney how this branding was put into motion, she responded that it was cultivated:

It's taught. It's taught. It's the philosophy. It's who you are here. And you know it. People know it. They learn it fast. Um, and then it's micro-managed and when you start slipping off of it, it's brought right back.

The most commonly coded areas for these two questions were: *Consultants* and *Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots), *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand), *Management*, *Money* (meeting bottom line).

PQ13: How independent are you in terms of making decisions? Constraints? From whom? (If less autonomy why?)

The responses were all over the map. Four responded that they were not autonomous, three responded that they were, two others also said they were, but for special reasons, and one gave an answer that I can't quite put into any category.

Among those who said they did not have autonomy was Donald. He said that he could suggest, but not decide:

I make suggestions, and I can ad-lib while on-air, but I can't just decide to do things without asking my superiors. Much of what we do is decided by several news manager types. I have a lot of experience and they take what I say seriously-but I can't go rogue on them, or I'd lose my job.

Two of the assignment editors responded that they were restricted by financial concerns. Robert discussed the cost to the station if editors wanted to assign a special story:

When it comes to, well...do we need to put this person on overtime, or what's going to cost us this, cost us that...well, is there another way to do things? Or, is there another way without spending that money, or can we? How can we?

Two of the three who said they were happy with their autonomy were primarily weekend producers and said that their autonomy was significantly higher on weekends when fewer supervisors were present. They noted, however, that management knew they understood the style of news that is expected of them.

Three others were complete outliers. One said that he did feel he was autonomous because he "doesn't care and is a wild card." Bob, who previously refused to answer a question regarding branding, responded with the following:

You have managers that are hired by the station's General Manager or by corporate or both and they're hired for certain reasons that bring certain ideals in so they need to be consulted as often as possible. So, I mean, it's definitely the checks and balances, you know.

Lance added that he had newfound autonomy due to short staffing. He said that management could not expect much when it did not provide help:

We're basically out there on our own, for the most part. And everything goes well when everything goes well. When things go bad, then you know, well, what happened out there? At this point now, where in the past we might have been shaking in our boots. Well, I don't know what happened. At this point, the position is, you don't have that to come back at us anymore.

The coding for RQ13 was as follows: *Job Satisfaction* (disillusionment, happiness), *Management, Consultants, Ownership* (non-local), *Hierarchy* (bosses answer to bosses) and *News Philosophy* (cultivation of style and brand), *Money* (stations financial issues).

PQ14: Are you happy with this degree of autonomy? Does it offend your journalistic morality in some way?

Of the four who said they were not autonomous, two said they were offended by this, but added that it was just the way things were at that point:

It is life. That is the way we are now. We are not, when I started 24 years ago, we were the 12th largest market in the country. Number 12! Now we're 24. So, you have to have those discussions in a market this size. It's not as free-wheeling as it used to be.

Coding for this question fell in the following areas: *Job Satisfaction* (disillusionment, burnout), *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand), *Money* (stations financial issues).

PQ15: What is the structure of supervision for your particular job?

See Appendix C. This question was used as a reference to help verify the hierarchical structure that is used in newsrooms. Each participant described his or her situation by explaining the basic chain of command. The only anomalies came as answers to other questions when some participants questioned the authority of certain managers and suggested that someone higher was in-fact making the rules.

PQ16: Are you satisfied with the amount of information you are able to deliver to the public?

Five out of ten responded with a “no” for PQ16; three responded yes and two gave a response with a clarifying statement. Overall, the participants were not happy with the amount of information they delivered to the public. This unhappiness did not pertain to the number of stories given in a newscast, but centered on the depth of those stories.

David gave what was a typical response to this question:

No, I wish we could do more. Story count I don't have a problem with. I think we cover a lot, in spite of you know...having the issues, the limitations we've discussed. I guess I've always been bothered by the information. I wish we could go into more depth.

Donald agreed with this opinion, but saw it as something that was just the nature of what he did:

We're never happy with the depth of detail, but that's TV. We just scratch the surface, sometimes we're allowed longer format stories or local documentaries, but most of what we do is quick stories-shows with a high story count.

Robert added that he was happy with the amount of news his station delivered, but part of his satisfaction was due to overcoming the challenges the newsroom faced:

Yeah. We do a heck of a job with the short amount of people we have here.

For her role in the newsroom, Adrienne often worked as a special projects producer and was allowed the depth for her productions that those who work on regular newscasts are not able to manage. She said she was happy with the amount of information the station delivered to the public:

I think one of the reasons I do what I do, public affairs, is that it's different from news and so we can do one topic or we can do several topics within a show. But, it's a longer form and there's more depth, I would say. There's more perspective provided to people.

The categories most coded for this question were: *News Philosophy/Style* (filling space, story count), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/attrition), *Money* (changing mindset about profits).

PQ17: Do you feel a sense of responsibility to the public?

The response to this question was an overwhelming “yes.” Nine of ten said they did feel a sense of responsibility to the public. The reasons given ranged from pride in the job done to pride in their communities. David added that he tried very hard to balance bad news with good things going on around the city:

Crime is a staple of local TV news. I mean it's easy to cover. It's emotional. It's all of the things that, that make for good TV news in a lot of cases. But, I think that we do have an obligation, and responsibility is maybe a better word, to try to balance that as best

we can with something that's positive and uplifting and about people who live in the neighborhoods where crime is a problem.

Kathy saw this responsibility as a community-alert situation where the news crew knew information that the audience also needed to know:

Absolutely. You know, the stories we cover, like, it's a little bit more than saying a story that affects the most people. But there are also stories that you have to take into consideration... could affect you next week, or next year. And with these stories, you do have a responsibility to tell people that, you know, someone is stealing money from the school district.

These examples were typical responses. Only one participant pointed out that he believed so many bad decisions had been made by upper management that he just asked what was wanted and provided it without much thought.

This question was coded generally as: *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *Job Satisfaction*, *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand).

PQ18: What is morale like in the newsroom?

Nine out of ten described low morale in the Pittsburgh market. The reasons given for the low morale were work overload, fear of losing jobs, disillusionment with the style of news, lack of encouragement, etc. Patrick reflected on concerns from veterans over staff cuts and jobs in production being replaced with automated systems:

It's bad. I mean, there's health...like I say, there's health issues. I mean people who have been here 30 years, are looking at, "what else can I do?" You know, and when you've been on one position for 30 years with one company, I mean they're [veteran practitioners]

really struggling to find what they want. And they made a decent living.

Kathy said it is a matter of staffing that causes morale to sink:

I think, well, for example, on a day when you are short staffed with your reporters, and your reporter is required to turn two stories in a day, and I think they feel cheated that they couldn't spend the time on one story because they were pressured to get this other story done.

Each practitioner had a personal story of what was causing low morale. The one constant revolved around job cuts and smaller staffs requiring extra work from those remaining.

Coding for PQ18 cut across many categories: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs, layoffs/attrition), *Money* (cost cutting), *Job Satisfaction-Morale* (stress/pressure, burnout, disillusionment), *More With Less*, *Fear* (of losing jobs), *Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots).

PQ19: Do you like your job as much as you did at first?

The responses here were split right down the middle. Five said "yes" and five said "no." The most common response among those who said "yes" was that they loved what they did-loved the excitement and variety and looked forward to work. Among those who responded with "no" were comments that broadcast news had shifted away from their initial interest in it and it was a changing business.

David said that he still liked the business, but wished that he was in radio as opposed to working in a TV newsroom:

I miss being on the air. If I had my druthers I'd still be involved in radio. Even radio has changed a lot since I left it. But, I still love news, so I'm involved in news.

Lance added that many of his co-workers were anxious to leave the business:

And the reason why I say it's a good question, because some people that are in my position, some photographers are absolutely burnt out. Completely, just can't wait to retire.

Lance continued that the changing role of his job had led to burnout. He said he had dealt with it better than others, but it was still a negative factor.

Coding for this question is discussed with the coding for PQ20.

PQ20: Would you enter the business now if you were fresh out of college-knowing what you know?

Four said "yes," they would go into the business right out of college, four said "no" and two were on the fence. There were a lot of middle of the road answers, or answers with a clarifying statement involved. David summed up a lot of the feelings expressed in the answers:

I still love news and the excitement of the newsroom, and storytelling. But, I'd have to think twice today, whereas 30 years ago I jumped in without looking.

Robert responded that he would try something else and gave two very different reasons:

No. I'm more of a "been there, done that" person. I would do something different only because I did that once. I want to try something new. Also, with technology um, changing so fast it's, there's just so many directions it can go. I really can't pinpoint where it's headed.

Still there are those, like Whitney, who, despite having concerns about where the business is heading, would absolutely go into it again:

Yes. Love it. Love it. It's a hoot. Love it. I don't think my alarm has ever awakened me in the morning shift, whatever. I've never not wanted to go to work. I enjoy it immensely.

Coding PQ19 and PQ20 were time consuming and, at times, confusing. What emerged were some clear indicators that became categories and subcategories: *Job Satisfaction* (job security, morale, disillusionment, happiness), *News Philosophy/Style* (growing competition/choices).

Further Findings-Pittsburgh

Less Experienced Help

This area kept coming up. The experienced practitioners in Pittsburgh were very concerned about the lack of experience of new help. The general argument was that management hired less experienced employees because they needed to take a leaner and meaner approach. However, some practitioners like Donald showed great concern over this:

The facts aren't checked like they used to be. The experience level of the people in the newsroom isn't what it used to be. You know, we can't, because our, our viewership isn't as large as it used to be, we can't pay people what we used to. So, with younger people with less experience and they may not have grown up here, or they don't maybe know quite as much as they should about the rules of

journalism and there's a few of us still around who, you know, try to catch everything, but that's a problem.

Lance shared this concern and added that when young people were brought in, they were not getting the oversight that they needed:

There's nothing wrong with young folks coming into the industry. There's always young folks coming into the newsroom. The problem that we have now, there's no oversight. You have young people coming straight out of college. Technically, they know most of the stuff. But they have no guidance.

In terms of coding these ideas fit into the categories of *Staffing* (less experienced help), *Money*, (cost cutting), *Job Satisfaction* (morale, stress/pressure), *Professionalism* (public responsibility).

Traditional Journalism as Reward

While not to the same extent as in Baltimore, the Pittsburgh stations also used traditional broadcast journalism standards as rewards. Participants mentioned that they looked forward to doing traditional types of stories and got excited about doing them. Candi said that she was motivated when she worked with her station's special investigative reporting team:

When it comes to that type of reporting, I mean, they'll go four or five minutes. And that's great. And then that four or five minutes won't even seem like four or five minutes because you're so engrossed in what, you know, they've been able to dig up. I'm all up for special projects, challenges and which...I like getting away from the newscasts sometimes, too, to do that. You know, like I handled

all of our Pope coverage. And so I would go and do interviews, you know, and all of that.

There was a similar comment from David, who had concerns about a lack of depth, but said that he looked forward to being able to work with the investigative team on assignments that allowed him to dig in and really tell a story:

With our investigative reports, we actually do take the time. And an investigative report could run three, three and a half, four minutes. And I think that's great. Of course, those stories need that time, you know, to tell the story.

Job Satisfaction (morale-happiness, time-issues) and *News Philosophy/Style* all were part of the coding for these comments.

Corporate Ownership

Once again, comments about corporate ownership (all negative) emerged throughout the interviews. From managers sent in by corporate bosses, to disillusionment about the future of news, the comments were frequent. David talked about why he thought his station's local government coverage lagged behind other broadcast outlets for a while:

I think part of it was because they weren't from around here...management weren't. They came in, they really didn't get it. They didn't understand the history of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh politics.

Patrick showed little confidence in the future of the business that he started out loving so much:

I joked years ago. Now I think I'm serious. I think four or five groups will have every station in the country. And then what kind of news diversity do you have? You don't have anything. And they're all afraid of the government. If Watergate happened today, it wouldn't be reported...because it would be overtime.

Lance added to Patrick's comments about corporate ownership's concerns about money, saying that the way television news is done has changed dramatically:

When I started, jumping on a flight to go somewhere to cover some news thing, and fly back the same day, no problem. I flew first class one time. But, now you don't have that. Um, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Cleveland, uh Detroit, those are driving trips. We aint flying there. Money. Salaries. Advertising. Money. Those stockholders in this particular company who have a stock concern. They want to see their profits. Money. More for less.

The coding for these comments came in the following areas: *Money* (profit margins-growing bottom line), *Ownership* (non-local), *Management* (hierarchy-bosses answer to bosses, who's calling the shots), *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *Job satisfaction* (morale-stress/pressure, disillusionment).

Chapter Seven:
Washington D.C. Market Findings

The Washington D.C. market (media market #8) consists of four major television stations that produce local news. There have been several changes in call letters and affiliations over the last sixty-plus years. The oldest of these stations is WTTG-TV. The station is owned and operated by FOX TV Stations (News Corporation)..WTTG follows the *Washington's Best News* brand. At the time of the interviews, News Corporation owned 26 television stations nationwide.

WRC is Washington's NBC affiliate. It first aired on June 27, 1947. WRC is an NBC O&O station. The station follows the *Working for You* brand. At the time of the interviews, NBC Owned 14 stations nationwide.

WJLA hit the airwaves on October 3, 1947. It is owned by Allbritton Communications Company and is D.C's ABC affiliate. WJLA also shares news with its sister cable station NewsChannel 8. WJLA follows the *On Your Side* brand. At the time of the interviews, Allbritton owned eight television stations nationwide.

WUSA is the city's CBS affiliate and is owned by the Gannett Company. The station followed no particular brand at the time, preferring only to use the station's call letters or "channel nine-news." At the time of the interviews, Gannett owned 23 television stations nationwide.

(Sources: www.nbcwashington.com, www.myfoxdc.com, www.wjla.com, www.wusatv9.com, www.stationindex.com, and participant interviews).

Participants

Adam has worked in broadcast news for 37 years. He is a long time reporter. The interview was conducted via telephone on October 28, 2008. It lasted 48 minutes.

Gary is a 31 year veteran of broadcast news. He has been a full time news photographer since 1976. The interview was conducted on Gary's back porch in Virginia on May 22, 2007. It lasted 55 minutes.

Sal is a 15 year veteran of broadcast news and is now an anchor/reporter in the District. The interview was conducted at a coffee shop in Washington D.C. on August 7, 2007. The interview lasted 69 minutes.

Greg is a 38 year veteran of broadcast news and a long time reporter. The interview took place in a coffee shop in Washington, D.C. on August 21, 2007. It lasted 58 minutes.

Jennifer is a 15 year veteran of broadcast news and a full time producer. The interview was conducted at a coffee shop in Washington D.C. on August 9, 2007. It lasted 58 minutes.

Penny is a 34 year veteran of broadcast news. She prides herself in "knowing her community" and enjoys being part of it. I met Penny on the outside patio of a coffee shop in Washington, D.C. on July 29, 2008. The interview lasted 49 minutes.

Amanda is a 27 year veteran reporter in the broadcast news industry. I spoke with Amanda via telephone on September 25, 2007. The interview lasted 46 minutes.

Jim is a long time anchor in Washington D.C. I met Jim at a coffee shop in Rockville, Maryland on August 17, 2007. The interview lasted 54 minutes.

Wanda is a 27 year veteran reporter of broadcast news. I met Wanda at a coffee shop in Washington D.C. on August 14, 2007. The interview lasted 55 minutes.

Will is a 25 year veteran of broadcast news. He currently works as an anchor/reporter. I spoke with Will in my office at the University of Maryland on May 10, 2007. The interview lasted 59 minutes.

Results: Washington D.C.

PQ1: What's going on in broadcast news?

Each of the participants in some way described change on a grand scale. Some mentioned technological changes and cable news as being part of the change. However, the overwhelming response was related to the corporate takeover of local news and media corporations trying to grow a bottom line in a diversified new media economy. Greg summed up, rather succinctly, what many of the others said in a more fragmented manner:

What's going on, in a nutshell, is that the big are getting bigger. It is a symptom, I think, Kevin, of what's going on in corporate America across the board. The family-owned entities, the smaller operator is getting bought up and the corporations are taking over increasingly. There are a lot of Wharton MBA's out there running the corporations and I do believe that the news organizations of the world are less committed to journalism, to the product now, than to the bottom line of profits.

For Adam, the reality was a little harsher. He used a famous quote as a comparison to what he said was going on in the corporate run business of news media:

Well, nothing good. The Hunter Thompson quote is still true... "A shallow money trench where pimps and thieves run free and good men die like dogs."²⁷ What I think is happening is that, uh, in the business realm, everybody expected it [local broadcast news] always to be a huge money generator and the audience always to grow. That's turned out not to be true. And at this point, stations are cutting back. There's no money for travel or anything like that.

Gary continued with this line of thinking, but added that the unknown was causing a lot of the problems he sees in the newsrooms:

Scrambling. Broadcast news and the companies that own the stations are scrambling because they don't know what the face of the future looks like and they are scrambling to try to get a piece of it. It's tough to try to get a piece of what you don't know.

While all of those interviewed described change, none of them described that change as positive.

²⁷ "The TV business is uglier than most things. It is normally perceived as some kind of cruel and shallow money trench through the heart of the journalism industry, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs, for no good reason. Which is more or less true" (Thompson, 1988).

The coding for this question was extensive and covered many concepts: *News Philosophy/Style* (Growing competition/choices), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/layoffs), *Money* (cost cutting, growing bottom line), *Job Satisfaction* (job security), *Fear* (of losing jobs), *Ownership* (non-local), *Hierarchy* (who's calling shots, technology (changes, internet/websites/blogging)).

PQ2: How long have you worked in broadcast news?

The average amount of time spent in the broadcast news industry for the Washington D.C. participants was 25.2 years. Some participants had experience in print before making the move into broadcast, but that time was not counted in their experience in the industry.

PQ3: Are you familiar with deregulation?

The participants in the Washington D.C. market were all very much aware of deregulation and the resulting corporate ownership. All of those interviewed answered “yes” or “somewhat” to this question. Some responded that they did not feel they understood enough about deregulation and the new laws to comment directly on deregulatory issues. Most did, however, share opinions about where they thought deregulation had led the industry. Jim was very clear in his thoughts:

I think that's affected a lot of things. I think the companies that own us...the companies have gotten bigger, because of consolidation and ownership. The companies have gotten bigger, so the stakes are higher.

Gary commented that the biggest change had been in the type of people who now were coming into the news industry; seeing it as a business more than a creative venture or public service:

People who creatively did it for fun, and I might add, did a pretty good job, have been minimized compared to the people throughout the station-not just the newsroom-who are “bean counters” and you hear that all the time. I think the biggest change has come in the quality of people being attracted. I think that there are people with less depth, people with an amazing lack of curiosity. It just amazes me at the producer, writer, entry level reporter level how few people have curiosity.

While not everyone felt comfortable commenting directly on deregulation, nobody responded that he or she saw it as a positive force. There were also comments that ownership wanted television to move more in the direction of radio as part of even larger corporations.

In terms of coding, those who elaborated on their answers touched most often on *Ownership-(non-Local)*, *Management*, *Staffing* (less experienced help), *Money* (profit margins), *Professionalism*, *News Philosophy/Style* (growing competition).

PQ4: Have things changed in the newsroom over the last ten to fifteen years?

Nine out of ten participants responded “yes” to PQ4. One responded that he had been in so many different newsrooms that he could not accurately answer the question. Of the changes discussed were the rise of cable, dealing with internet competition and having to work on their station’s own website. However, the biggest changes mentioned

were smaller staffs, corporate ownership and a shift in philosophy from public service to a market-model mindset. Wanda summed up what many touched on in the interviews:

What's happened...about eight years ago, we started changing in leaps and bounds. Every year was like a light year. And suddenly, the whole era, the remnants of the Golden Age of TV news, just turned into stardust...caught by the wind and there it went. They were cutting our budget. Suddenly the number of people doing a show was dwindling and they were doing buyouts and getting rid of personnel. They were combining jobs. If someone quit, we didn't replace them. If a reporter quit, that job stayed open forever.

Jennifer shared similar information as Wanda. She discussed the expanding scope of TV news on a daily basis, but also the change in size of the crew that does it:

You used to have 50 people who put a station's newscast on the air in a day, now you've got 40 people doing it, but they're also asking those same 40 people to do more. I mean it. It's 40 people putting on the same amount of news, but they also have to address the internet. They also have to address, you know, a podcast.

Others mentioned factors stemming from increased competition from cable and internet and issues based on the growing bottom line as noted above. While nearly all of the practitioners discussed cost cutting measures at the stations, none of them thought it was because the stations were in trouble financially, but considered it stemming from a different news philosophy.

Coding for PQ4 revolved around: *News Philosophy* (Filling Space, Story Count), *Staffing* (Shrinking Staffs/Layoffs and Attrition), *Money* (Cost Cutting), *Technology* (internet/websites/ blogging), *News Philosophy/Style* (growing competition).

PQ5: Has your job description changed?

Nine of ten answering the previous question said that things had changed in the newsroom. Seven of ten said that their actual job descriptions had changed. Some of the change involved performing additional duties. Amanda pointed out that a reporter at her station now had a very different job than one did even a few years prior:

It's drastically changed. At Channel 9, we became the first major market television station in the country to pretty much go all "one man band." And that's their intention. They want not only the reporters to be "one man band," but they would like to have the 90 people in the news department all generating content and the people, producers going out and doing stories. Photographers going out and shooting and reporting stories as well. And then have the reporters shoot, write and edit.

Penny responded that her job as a photographer had a completely different focus than it once did. She described how speed, over quality, had become the name of the game in being a successful news photographer:

You shoot with the idea that I may have five minutes to cut this...I better make these long shots and long zooms. It's sad, but you know you have to cover yourself because the important thing is not what your shot looks like, but that it meets its deadline. And that's the law of the jungle.

The coding for PQ5 was as follows: *Money* (cost cutting, profit margins), *Job satisfaction* (workload, time issues, more with less), *Management*, *Technology*.

PQ6: What is your daily work routine like?

All practitioners described their basic current work routine for their particular job. Like the Pittsburgh participants, all ten had differences due to varying shifts, different positions and different areas of focus (for example, an investigative reporter had a much different day than a general assignment reporter). Each mentioned a time of day when he or she did some work with the station website or uploaded video. Once again, no participants mentioned a break time. One of the participants mentioned that his work routine is never the same, due to his position as a photographer. He often headed to different places from home to meet reporters, etc.

PQ7: Is that routine the same as it's always been?

Six of ten described their work routines as having changed, mostly in the past five to ten years, while eight of the ten described changing routines due to news staffs being shorthanded for various periods of time. Sal described his routine as an anchor having changed because between shows, he was not just checking and practicing reading scripts, but he also had to report a story. This additional duty had changed his routine significantly:

I mean, it's hard, because you only have, like I said, an hour, maybe an hour and a half a day. So, now it's like I gotta get this weekly story done, but it's kinda hard to get it done in an hour when, typically if a reporter shoots for that story, they have eight hours to work on it. So, it's busy, It definitely keeps you busy. Which is not really what was in the past.

Will, who was also an anchor, described how working with inexperienced writers and producers had changed his routine dramatically. Will pointed out that an expected level of professionalism in mid to large size markets had gone away:

The remarkable thing is I anchor the 9:00 a.m. show and you'd think, okay, you've vetted everything from 5:00 and 6:00, how can there possibly be mistakes at 9:00, and this morning on the 9:00 news I read a script cold and it had been duped over from earlier, and [there had] been some minor tweaking and it was wrong. When I worked in Columbus, Ohio we had guys who were producing on the weekends who had been in the business a long time and were really, really good. We just never had problems like that.

Jennifer described additional duties pertaining to internet and blog postings that changed her routine as a producer, but added that it was being shorthanded for long periods of time that really made a difference:

We had a producer leave, it got to be close to eight months ago, and there just doesn't, there's no sense of urgency, of gee, we need to fill this position. It's just status quo and acceptable at one point to, oh, it's Thursday, it's my day to do double shift.

The coding for PQ7 was largely in the following areas: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/attrition), *Job Satisfaction* (workload), *Technology* (changes, internet/website blogging), *News Philosophy/Style* (filling space), *Management*.

PQ8: Are you doing the same amount of work as you did 15 years ago?

Asking the question directly provided some very blunt answers. Will discussed how a constantly expanding routine continued to add to the workload:

Absolutely, because you're multi-tasking. There's all this other stuff that comes on that, you know, up to about four or five months ago I didn't have that. I mean, it's like continually adding stuff to your plate.

Jennifer discussed her increasing workload of duties that she thought others should have:

Definitely more. Definitely more work. And I understand why I'm doing it. But, in another way, it doesn't really make that much sense. I mean there's no reason why [other] people who are already producing the various elements of newscasts, reporter, producer, writer, can't take that same information and just kind of post it someplace else.²⁸

While most newsroom workers described extra duties, the reporters talked about doing a new type of job or preparing to do one. Amanda described how having to shoot and edit some or all of her own video took away from her best skills:

I think it devalues me as a reporter, honestly. What I like about reporting is sitting down with a producer over the tape and putting it all together and you don't really get to do that under this system. You've just got to get it done quickly. I'm okay as a photographer. Mediocre, you know. I can get it done, but I'm not going to be as good a photographer as somebody who's devoted 20 years of their life to be the photographer. And a photographer is not going to ever be as good a reporter as I am. I just think it devalues everybody.

Coding for this section broke down into the following areas: *Job Satisfaction* (workload, more with less, time issues), *Technology* (changes, internet/websites/blogging), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/attrition, less experienced help), *Money* (cost cutting), *Morale* (burnout, stress, pressure), *Fear* (of losing jobs).

²⁸ Interesting that those who work the other positions claimed to be doing exactly what Jennifer suggested.

PQ9: How many hours of news programming does your station do each day? Was it always this number?

The average number of hours each station spent on news programming each day was 5.65. Five participants worked in stations that produced 5.5 hours of news per day, two worked in stations that produced 6.5 hours and two worked in stations that produced eight hours. As mentioned in chapter four, this number has increased in recent years. While all had been at their particular stations for different amounts of time, eight of ten said they had seen increases in the number of news shows the station did daily. The average amount of increased show time was 90 minutes. Since participants had not been at their station for the same amount of time, this figure is only partially useful (a 20 year veteran of a station might have seen the number of newscasts doubled, while a newer employee might have seen no change at all). Nobody reported a decrease and seven said news shows had increased.

PQ10: Is the newsroom staff you work with the same size as the one you've always worked with?

Nine of ten practitioners said that the newsroom staff had gotten smaller despite the number of shows increasing. The lone practitioner who said that his staff was the same size was Sal, who pointed out that his station had actually added staff, but not in proportion to the number of shows it had added. All of the others noted some sort of smaller staff. Long time anchor Jim explained the situation:

I think you could say it's probably shrunk, compared to what it used to be. I think there are probably fewer people doing more work now,

so I think that's part of the frustration that a lot of us feel. It's definitely a money thing. And it comes with the pressure on these huge corporations to make big profit. Say it makes a five percent profit this year, so that's terrific. Make a ten percent profit next year. Making ten percent profit would be great. Make a fifteen percent profit next year.

Jennifer not only answered that the staff had shrunken, but that it was visible to others in the newsroom:

You can certainly trace a line of like, well, these four people left. And whoever really replaced those four people? I mean you can certainly see a trend of, oh well, those four people retired. Do we need to replace that person? Do we really need to fill that position? It's not so much people being fired or anything like that, but it's kind of a war of attrition.

Short staffing led others to fill in the gaps. Amanda said as a reporter the smaller staff meant she had to pick up the slack:

I need something for every show. Five, six and seven. In some form. It might be a package at five and a live shot at six, maybe a VO/SOT and then doing something different at seven.

Penny, who worked at a different station as a photographer, echoed a similar thought as to the strains of shrinking staffs:

And there's the element of people being afraid to say no. I just think because reporters are under contract for two or three years, they're afraid to say no a lot of times. So, they say yes to some absolutely ludicrous things. And when you say, I can't do this, I need help. They'll say just do it! Just do it! It's like, if it doesn't get done I don't know who's gonna get in trouble.

The coding for PQ10 included these elements: *Staffing* (shrinking staffs/attrition), *Money* (cost cutting, profit margins-growing bottom line), *Job Satisfaction* (job security, morale-stress/pressure, workload, more with less), *Fear* (of losing jobs), *Ownership* (non-local), *Management*.

PQ11: Does your station have a “brand” of news? Who decides what it is?

Responses to this question were interesting because one station in Washington D.C., at the time of the interviews, did not use a brand. Five out of ten participants responded “yes” to this question. All of those who answered “yes” pointed out that branding was a corporate decision. All of those who worked at a station with branding presented themselves as being very aware of how it was put into motion (PQ12). Sal was very clear about who made the decision:

That all comes from the top. That’s all done by corporate. Marketing department, the promotions, all that is uniform. All that comes from corporate.

Greg actually brought the subject up on his own as he described how large corporate owned stations were producing very similar newscasts:

There’s a cookie-cutter mold. The newscast producers are indoctrinated and trained to have essentially the same brand. There’s this new news word out there: “brand.” And they’re trying to garner their little piece of the audience.

Asked where the idea of branding came from, Greg responded sternly:

It came from consultants. Oh, it came from consultants. About ten years ago, I think it began creeping in.

The coding for these two questions was similar to coding for the same questions in the other markets: *Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots), *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand), *Management, Consultants, Ownership* (non-local).

PQ13: How independent are you in terms of making decisions? Constraints? From whom? (If less autonomy why?)

Eight out of ten said that they felt some type of constraints in terms of autonomy. Some said that the Washington D.C. market aired so much news (an overall average of 6.66 hours of news per day, while Baltimore produced five and Pittsburgh 5.5) that most stories were accepted as long as they were done on time. Still, constraints were present as in other markets. This lack of autonomy, said Greg, was partially because of the short staff his station is experiencing:

The fact is because we are so lean, the list of obligatory stories drives the day. There's that short list on any given day of the obligatory stories that have to get covered.

Adam added that his autonomy had diminished despite his nearly 40 years of experience:

Well, I'd like to be able to choose what I do every day and once, I had a franchise like that, where I did assign myself every day for four years, but nothing lasts very long in TV and after a while the new News Director came and killed that franchise.

Amanda added that while there are constraints, she did not have a problem with not being autonomous:

That's not one of my issues. I don't have an issue with you telling me, you know, here's the really big story today and we don't have enough, we only have two people and we need you to do it.

In terms of where the constraints were found, those interviewed generally added that they came from the newsroom system under which they worked. News meetings were conducted (sometimes including the participants and sometimes not), where ideas were pitched and decisions made, usually by management. Those interviewed pointed out that they were all free to suggest stories or formatting ideas (for producers), but if they did not fit the plans set in motion by the news management, they would not be accepted.

Coding for PQ13 was largely in the areas of: *News Philosophy/Style* (story count, cultivation of style and brand), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs), *Money* (cost cutting), *Job Satisfaction* (more with less), *Management*.

PQ14: Are you happy with this degree of autonomy? Does it offend your journalistic morality in some way?

All eight of those who said they felt some kind of constraint added that they would have liked to have more or complete autonomy considering their experience. In terms of being offended from a journalists standpoint, only four said that they were. Will added that while he was offended by having to do certain types of stories, so were others on his shift:

Oh, yeah, of course. Yes, of course. And I'm not alone. I mean, the "Inside Edition" thing, you know.²⁹ I keep going back to the executive producer and saying, come on. And my co-anchor does, too. But, he's like, this is from on-high and if I could change it, I'd change it. I feel much the same as you do, but we're stuck.

²⁹ Will had earlier discussed that "Inside Edition" was the show that led into their newscast and they often had to promote stories coming up on the next day's episode. This offended Will because he did not consider "Inside Edition" a real news magazine show.

Some comments were like those from Gary, who saw the lack of autonomy as a system failure and did not let himself be offended by it:

I'd like to do more. I think I've got ideas that I could bring that would build value. Surprisingly, for all the talk of lack of resources, for all the talk of what can't be done, there's so few people in management who have any vision of doing something different or better. And maybe they can't accomplish it. They don't try.

The coding for PQ14 was similar to the previous markets: *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand), *Job Satisfaction* (morale, disillusionment), *Management, Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots).

PQ15: What is the structure of supervision for your particular job?

See Appendix A. This question was used as a reference to help build and verify the hierarchical structure that is used in newsrooms. Each participant described his or her situation by explaining who the immediate boss was, followed by the basic chain of command. The only anomalies came as answers to other questions when, as in the other markets, some participants questioned the authority of certain managers and suggested that someone higher was actually making the rules.

PQ16: Are you satisfied with the amount of information you are able to deliver to the public?

The answers were split into three responses. Two participants said that they were satisfied with the amount of information that they delivered to the public. Five said they were not at all satisfied and three said they were satisfied with the story count, but not the

quality or depth of the information. Greg was not happy with the depth of the coverage and thought that the focus on high story count was a flat out mistake:

In this age of faster paced news, we have surely given up a degree of comprehensive coverage. Channel 9, in particular, through the '70's, '80's, used to have a really kick-ass one hour program, where the first block of news at 6:00 would run fifteen minutes on most days, with really just in-depth news reports and in-depth is kind of obsolete anymore.

Jim, who worked at a different station, had almost the exact response as Greg. Jim, however, did not believe those who said high story count was necessary:

I think it's a mistake in many ways. I think it's underestimating the attention span of the viewer. They assume that people's attention spans are very short and unless the story's constantly changing, they're not going to pay attention. They're not going to stick with you. I don't know that that's true.

What turned out to be a recurring theme was the response from Wanda that the story count was fine, but depth was lacking:

We give them a lot of information. Okay. The way you asked that question...am I satisfied with the amount of information? Yes. Ask me if I'm satisfied with the quality of information...No. We're tallying a lot of crap. Useless crap and we're giving them the impression that they're informed. And they're not. I wonder if we're doing more harm than good. I really do. And I don't think it's intentional, but I think just the, the swiftness of the change in our industry and the fact that we're just treading water trying to keep our heads above the bottom line.

The coding for PQ16 was as follows: *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *News Philosophy/Style* (story count, filling space), *Money* (changing mindset about

profits), *Ownership* (non-local), *Management* (consultants), *Professionalism* (public responsibility).

PQ17: Do you feel a sense of responsibility to the public?

The response to this question was an across the board “yes.” Most followed with an explanation of why they felt this responsibility. Amanda answered:

Oh, absolutely! You know, they’re looking to us, um to fill in their blanks you know, about things they see on the way to work or things they hear about. So, we do have a responsibility. I take it seriously.

Others, like Wanda mentioned this without me asking the question. Wanda explained why she had this sense of responsibility:

I got to create a special niche. I got to create [a special web segment] that enabled me to, um, now I feel like I’m back to the mission, which is to inform the public so they can make choices about their lifestyle and the government.

Will answered with a clear “yes” to this question and went on to explain that he was frustrated by management and ownership because they do not view responsibility the way he does:

I think that the dollars out there, are just like I said, the pie is cut in so many different ways and journalism isn’t the calling it once was. It’s just a business, you know, and I think their key is...get the ratings and not piss off the advertisers.

The coding was wide ranging once again: *Money* (stations financial issues, profit margins-changing mindset about profits), *Professionalism* (public responsibility), *Fear* (of losing money/resources).

PQ18: What is morale like in the newsroom?

In all three markets, all ten participants said that morale was down. Jim provided a response that was reflective of several different practitioner answers:

I think people love their work, but by and large, I think there's just a sense of being crazed. Of just, the reporters in the field go out and it's just crazy...to go out and get a story with all the pressure that is just so intense every day. Because there are so few reporters. The managers say, we want this story in the newscast and you're doing it.

Gary not only described the morale situation as being down but after a pause gave insight into what might bring it back:

Well, I think that the morale is one of resignation and hope. We are still lucky to have a core of people here who have experienced being number one. Who have lived here, who put down roots, who are good reporters, good photographers, good anchors and they, they hope to get it back. But they also realize that it's not all in their domain. That the, the kinds of commitments, the types of commitments that are going to be required to be more competitive are ones that have to come from the ownership.

Greg added that he kept pushing for what he thought would put newsrooms back where they used to be:

I don't let it get me down, because I still think we do, by and large, a public service. I love to preach the substance gospel. There are certain types of stories in 2007 that are becoming fewer and farther between; political coverage, governmental coverage, court coverage, which is slipping away to a large degree. I think by providing substance is the way to the future rather than more pablum and more glitz. I think that has been the turn off for broadcast news.

Other examples of morale being low centered around massive staff cuts, no opportunity to catch up with work demands, lack of public service commitment and lack of support and encouragement from management for practitioners.

Coding for PQ18 was extensive, once again: News Philosophy/Style (cultivation of style and brand), *Staffing* (shrinking staffs, layoffs/attrition), *Money* (cost cutting), *Job Satisfaction-Morale* (stress/pressure, burnout, disillusionment, more with less), *Fear* (of losing jobs), *Hierarchy* (who's calling the shots), Professionalism (public responsibility).

PQ19: Do you like your job as much as you did at first?

The responses were split down the middle. Five said they liked their jobs as much as they did at first and five said they did not. Many of the most animated responses came from reporters. Amanda responded to the question very quickly and firmly:

No. No, I don't, I don't want to be a photographer/editor. I want to be a reporter. I have absolutely no interest in shooting my own stories and managing them.

Greg, another reporter, responded positively to the question, but offered some additional comments:

Yeah, I do. And that's no baloney. I really do. I still think we provide a vital service. We do it in a different way. We don't do it, I think, as good as we did in the past, but we have our moments.

Will answered the question, but took issue with it altogether:

That's an unfair question, but the answer is no. I guess, I think it's an unfair question because I'm wiser now. I think I had a Pollyanna viewpoint when I first got in and the business has changed and I've

kind of had to change along with it. I'd like to go back, but I don't think those days are likely to ever come back.

PQ20: Would you enter the business now if you were fresh out of college-knowing what you know?

Five said they would go into the business if they were just finishing college, four said they would not and one was not sure. Will leaned toward going into the business, but said he would take note of what is going on:

I'd like to think I'd still want to go into the profession, but I think I'd probably go in with my eyes wide open, knowing that it's changed a lot and it's continuing to change. There's no way to predict how much more it's going to change.

Greg was on the fence about entering the business of broadcast journalism, but made the point that it's not broadcast journalism itself that he has a problem with:

That is a good question, Kevin. I don't know the answer to that right now, because it all gets back...[to the challenge]. Surely the challenge of journalism is still very appealing, but the way it's headed right now...you know.

Amanda added that while she could not say what she would think if she were fresh out of school, but said knowing what she knows now, she would not go into the business which she described through a hypothetical job ad:

If it said Multimedia Journalist Wanted who can shoot and edit daily and post for the web and be live...and. I wouldn't apply for that job.

Coding for PQ19 and PQ20 was difficult and time consuming. Those areas most noted were: *Job Satisfaction* (job security, workload, disillusionment, burnout,

happiness), *News Philosophy/Style* (growing competition), *Management, Technology* (internet).

Further Findings-Washington D.C.

Less Experienced Help

While in other markets the issue of less experienced help emerged as a problem, the situation seemed worse in Washington D.C. Many of those interviewed cited the problem of staffs being smaller than they should be. Will explained that it put those like him into a whole new area of supervision:

We have people at our station who haven't been in the business very long at all and are producing newscasts. So, as an anchor, you know, you're also a managing editor. You're trying to flag all the mistakes and make sure you get the information correct...and there are a lot of them every day.

Wanda pointed out that not only is it lower-level help that was less experienced, but individuals in prominent newsroom roles:

And then about eight years ago, it started, then it started accelerating...suddenly the quality dropped off and we were bringing in people that you were wondering, how did they hire this person?

Coding for this issue was largely in the following areas: *Staffing* (less experienced help), *Money*, (cost cutting), *Job satisfaction* (morale, stress/pressure, more with less), *Professionalism* (public responsibility).

Traditional Journalism as Reward

Using what practitioners described as more “traditional broadcast journalism” as a reward was also common in Washington, D.C. Practitioners said they were offered special areas where they could do an extended story or have complete autonomy over a story or series. This, presumably, offered a break in the routine of what practitioners described as a rapidly paced grind. Examples of this were Wanda (as we read in a quote from PQ17) and her special web segment and website blog. Jim said that he reported on special longer form stories (about once per month) and it gave him a great deal of autonomy and satisfaction:

Since I’ve been doing these stories, I’m the one who picks the stories I’m doing. I’m the one who decides how I’m going to tell them. I get to tell the story the way I want to tell it. I get to tell the stories I want to tell.

Jim described this as something that he looked forward to and gave him his own area of specialty that nobody else has.

The coding for what is called “Traditional Journalism as Reward” largely revolves around *Job Satisfaction* (morale, happiness), *Professionalism* (public responsibility).

Corporate Ownership

As in the previous markets, comments about corporate ownership were common. The Washington, D.C. market was not an exception. Clearly, the practitioners were

unhappy with the corporate style of ownership at their television stations. Will discussed the different mindset of working for a station that was locally owned and had, as he described it, a completely different approach to producing news:

And they felt it was their duty to cover that city and that community and it was something that was indoctrinated into all of us and we approached the news almost like Green Berets.

Jennifer offered a different perspective of corporate ownership since she works for a Gannett-owned station that is the local flagship of the Gannett company, which is based in nearby Virginia:

As a station, I think we're more restricted. I think there's a lot more nervousness at the top. You know, if I'm in Denver, I can take a chance and if it fails, odds are, the guys in Virginia might hear about it, but they're not going to witness it. Whereas, if I'm in Washington D.C., and I decide to take a gamble and it fails, I'm busted because everybody's seeing it right there.

Jennifer added that this created a great deal of nervousness and worry by management that filtered down through the newsroom.

There were no positive comments about corporate ownership.

Coding for these comments fell into the areas of: *Ownership* (non-local), *Management* (consultants, hierarchy-bosses answer to bosses, who's calling the shots), *News Philosophy/Style* (cultivation of style and brand), *Job Satisfaction* (morale-stress/pressure, disillusionment).

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusions

Summary of Findings-Interview Questions

The overwhelming majority of questions revealed across the board consensus, despite differences in the media markets. Among that consensus was recognition of change, instability and unhappiness with the shifting broadcast news landscape in the years 2007 through 2009. By and large broadcast journalists still liked broadcast journalism and twelve said they would go back into the profession again if they were just starting their careers (four others said they might). Those participants who said they were not happy or would not go back into the business usually explained that it was recent changes and not broadcast news itself that were the problem.

Research Questions answered

RQ1: *Are the changes positive or negative in terms of broadcast news?*

Clearly the interviews revealed that the practitioners believed changes involving corporate expansion during this time of a shifting landscape have caused negative effects. While not a single participant described the changes as positive, there was very specific consensus on what those negative effects were. There were those who were disillusioned or angry and those who saw the changes as more of an obstacle rather than a permanent road block. Regardless, the findings show that nearly all of the participants saw the changes negatively.

RQ2: *How, exactly, have the structural changes affected daily routines of news professionals?*

The first aspect of these perceived negative changes was the belief that the participants were doing “more with less.” Evidence that every station had an overall increase in the number of news programs in the years preceding the interviews, coupled with a reported decrease in the number of newsroom practitioners, gave credence to these claims. While technology has made possible the trimming of staff in many professions, the participants argued that it had actually increased their workload. New expectations for web posting of broadcast stories and blogging have been added to a previously regular routine.

Another aspect of these changes was working with less experienced help. This was a finding that grew completely out of the interviews and was not considered while planning this research. Practitioners in all positions and markets commented that working with less experienced help had changed their routines due to the need for more oversight of those newly hired. Many complained that ownership/management made an argument for a “leaner and meaner” staff, only to put inexperienced individuals in key roles due to cost-cutting measures. This, according to the participants, resulted in required oversight that was not needed previously. This oversight was said to be time-consuming, frustrating and blocking the established routines of every practitioner involved in the newsroom process.

Photographers made clear that their routines were specifically different after the changes in ownership took hold. Getting outstanding shots in the field and clever video editing had been subordinated to a process of speed. Photographers argued that their own

value was now judged by the volume of work they could create rather than its quality and that many of the skills they spent decades honing were rendered obsolete by the new expectations.

For their part, producers of broadcast news had many new duties. Traditionally busy producers now had to deal with web posting, blogging and even video editing expectations. An added element was sharing and splitting stories with other producers. This had become an important element of producing because there were so many shows in a given day that producers had to be sure not to overlap on stories. This was referred to among producers of newscasts that ran back-to-back as “the split.” As the number of newscasts increased over time, this became an issue for producers (particularly the 5:00pm and 6:00pm producers). Participants saw it a standard part of their job to coordinate with other producers what stories will be used in which newscast.

Daily routines for anchors had changed as well. Throughout the interviews they described increased work in every market. Previously holding glamour positions, anchors now were expected to write and assist in producing. Some news anchors discussed reporting stories in between being on camera and working on long-term projects. However, the biggest change anchors saw in their routine was the oversight of less experienced help. Since most anchors are senior members of the news room and they are often the final gatekeepers before information is delivered over the air, they claimed their level of responsibility had skyrocketed in the five to ten years before the interviews took place. This change in routine they said they never imagined would become part of their job in a large market.

Of all of the newsroom positions with a change in routine, the position of reporter changed the most. Some reporters experienced increased story load, while others were given the option (or were soon expected to be given the option) of either reporting and shooting video by themselves or resigning from their positions. For those who had worked their way up through the ranks of the smaller markets, this was a cause of great concern, because they have not shot or edited video in many years. This change went beyond a change in daily routine into a complete change in job requirements and expectations.

One of the most significant findings regarding daily routines was that many practitioners did not believe that they had a routine at all due to the ever-changing number of newsroom workers. Those practitioners said their routines changed every few weeks or months depending not on *if* the newsroom staff was shorthanded, but *where* it was lacking practitioners. This perceived lack of routine was a common discussion point during the interviews and made at least two of the questions difficult to answer for the participants.

RQ3: *Are views and practices of professional responsibility and autonomy intact?*

In terms of autonomy, 18 out of 30 participants said they were not autonomous or that they felt constraints that they did not think they should have. Among the 12 who said they were free to make decisions, some of them offered a qualifying statement regarding the reasons for their autonomy, such as that they worked a shift where little or no management was present, or there was an understanding with management what type of decisions would be made. Of those who felt these constraints, the majority said they were

offended by them as journalists. There also was an element of acceptance among the practitioners that, while they lack the autonomy they desired as journalists, they recognized this was a result of the system under which they worked and since they could not do anything about it, they would not allow themselves to be offended by it.

In terms of professional responsibility, 29 out of 30 responded that they felt a sense of responsibility to the public. Comments ranged from a desire to inform the public about government to helping viewers understand their local communities and taking responsibility to get the story right. Participants made it clear that they felt a sense of responsibility to the public.

Based on the responses given, practitioners held intact a sense of responsibility to their viewers, but they generally did not believe they had enough autonomy in delivering needed information to them. For those directly in the field (reporters and photographers) this seemed especially troubling.

RQ4: *How has morale in the newsroom been affected?*

In the minds of the participants, morale in their newsrooms was either lower than they ever had seen it or was at an all time low with 27 out of 30 participants saying that morale was not good to at least some degree. The reasons given included the pressure of added workloads, burnout from high levels of stress, fear of being laid off and disillusionment with the direction of the broadcast news industry. Many participants said that morale often had been low due to the high level of stress and deadline pressure in newsrooms, but that it had gotten much worse in recent years.

RQ5: *Do news professionals feel that changes have affected the quality of news they are able to deliver to the public?*

While the quality of news is highly subjective and differs from person to person and among news organizations, the majority of participants said that they were not satisfied with the amount of information they were able to deliver to the public. This often led to longer conversations which resulted in a finding that while story count in news programs was high and practitioners touched on many stories, they were not satisfied with the depth of news that they delivered. With high story count also came shorter stories and this did not sit well with the participants. The majority said that the demand for faster-paced shows and high story count affected what they perceived to be the quality of the news broadcasts.

Open Coding:

The use of open coding was instrumental in answering the research questions and allowing theory to emerge from the interviews. Open coding is not a method of determining results quantitatively in a study. Rather, it is a system that helps the researcher to better understand what he/she is looking at in the transcriptions and makes it easier to understand the information. Beginning with a large amount of raw data not separated into categories of any kind (as with a quantitative study) provided me with little in the way of answers to the research questions. At that point, only “yes” or “no” answers to the questions could be given. The systematic method of analyzing (and re-analyzing) the raw data and looking for tendencies and key words (such as *staff*, *consultants* or

burnout) allowed me to begin the process of discovering concepts, which led to the development of categories and sub-categories (Appendix C). Through this analysis, I was able to clearly identify tendencies in categories that provided depth and validity in the answering the research questions. For example, it is easy to look at RQ4 and see that 27 out of 30 respondents said that morale was affected negatively. However, only the analysis through coding made clear what the practitioners thought the reasons were (workloads, burnout, stress, fear of being laid off and disillusionment). Coding for each interview question allowed for understanding and development of answers to the larger, overriding research questions.

Coding also helped in the development of the theories discovered in the study. Grounded theory allows theories to emerge throughout the research. Open coding went hand in hand with this development. Through the emergence of categories, it became clear that hierarchy of influences and social/public responsibility were the theoretical bases behind the responses of the participants. The coding showed that these two theories provided background for a common thread throughout the study. Without actually coding the data, these two theories could only be described as hypotheses rather than theories that actually emerged from the research.

Theory in the Findings

Theories

When using grounded theory, the goal is to allow theories to emerge and play a prominent role in the studies. Two theories clearly took hold in the analysis of data as a

guiding force in what participants said in response to initial questions and subsequent probing. These theories outlined very clearly what participants overwhelmingly saw as the problems brought about by deregulation during the general time period we are analyzing.

Hierarchy in the Findings

The importance of hierarchy came through in responses and concerns expressed by participants. These were consistent in all three markets and underlay responses from nearly all thirty participants. Each is discussed in detail in the results sections of the document, but an overview here summarizes the findings and make clear how these theories emerged through grounded analysis.

First, the participants described hierarchical structure as influencing nearly everything in their newsrooms. The general argument was that media conglomerates were rarely local and cannot possibly understand the needs of each particular community in which they operate. A standard model of production is put into place for all stations (sometimes 20, 30 or more). This means that all stations owned by the same company have the same music, color scheme, graphics etc. The common practice is to periodically send in consultants to organize a look, sound and feel for stations. These consultants will often do everything from tell anchors how to dress to decide what types of stories need more attention in order to appeal to a target audience and draw in more advertising. Management is put in place on all levels to carry out these ideas and stations are branded

(“Taking Action for You”, “Local News You Can Count On”) with the look and style of each show influenced by the model designated by corporate consultants.

Second, practitioners described “doing more with less” as a major problem. With newsroom cutbacks, jobs were combined or eliminated causing routines to be disrupted and greatly altered. One could argue that in recent decades everyone is doing more with less, due to technological advancements and less need for many actual workers in the workplace. The participants in this study, however, argued that technological advancements have actually been used to increase workloads and put practitioners in a position to perform tasks for which they have not been trained and do not have expertise. The hierarchical structure is such that ownership is rarely local and cannot see the difficulties created by such changes. If remaining workers were able to complete tasks, this was seen as less expensive and more workable than the previous operation. The majority of those interviewed argued that they were no longer able to perform at a level that they thought was respectable.

Finally, the newsroom hierarchy was a concern for practitioners because of the need for a growing bottom line. Whereas newsrooms were once interested simply in covering costs and hoped to turn a profit, the business model used by corporate ownership was crafted to show a growing financial bottom line. This had an effect on the newsroom hierarchy on nearly every level. Upper management had to keep salaries and payroll in line, producers had to appeal to the target audience, even if this went against their better judgment regarding what was important to the communities covered by the newscast. Low level managers had to keep practitioners on a strict timeline to avoid paying overtime and less expensive, hourly wage assistants were put in places where

experienced professionals used to be. The concerns of the hierarchy thus were overwhelmed by the need to meet the bottom line. Several respondents described upper management not filling open positions for much longer than had been planned. They argued that this was due to upper management earning bonuses for meeting or exceeding expectations regarding annual budgets. The shorthanded newsroom caused considerable problems for practitioners who had to pick up the slack of a purposefully understaffed team for each newscast.

On the whole, practitioners described each level as influenced by a higher level that was concerned with only financial bottom line growth. Whereas pride in the product was once the main goal, the goal now was strictly on finances even if those in the newsroom thought the quality of their broadcast was suffering.

Social Responsibility Theory in the Findings

Analyzing the interviews for this study, I found that not only did the concept of social responsibility emerge as a theory, but also as the backbone that ties the whole study together. Practitioners were frustrated with what they considered a split in philosophy with ownership since deregulation allowed expanded corporate ownership. In newsrooms that once operated under a collective public service model (philosophically and legally), some were now experiencing a situation in which ownership and management were focused strictly on the market model. Through deregulation, ascertainment laws and the Fairness Doctrine had been eliminated. With ownership laws also deregulated, corporate ownership was expanded by some groups and a market model

was put into place. This change in philosophy was of great concern and frustration for many of the practitioners interviewed. The ramifications of this split in philosophy were at the core of the concerns and complaints for practitioners.

When asked if they felt a sense of responsibility to the public with the broadcast journalism that they produce, all but one participant said yes. This simple question often led, without probing, to long, but nearly identical explanations of daily challenges that resulted from efforts to uphold public responsibility. Most of those interviewed described a large split with ownership and upper management on this issue. While experienced newsroom practitioners held firmly to the practice of social responsibility, they argued that management categorically did not. Philosophical differences in what needs to be emphasized on a daily basis were voiced and outright rebellion against the market minded practices of management were frequently discussed by the participants.

Most practitioners described frustration with trying to maintain daily production of news, at a level they find respectable, given the constraints created by budget cuts and focus on a target market demographic put in place by management. While it was clear to practitioners that management now had a market philosophy, those interviewed remained steadfast in their belief that daily newscast production should serve the public. The typical argument was that instead of creating news designed to meet target demographics, the focus should be on best serving the community and creating the best possible newscast, which then would gain viewership and bring advertisers. This, in turn, would allow market concerns to take care of themselves.

Another challenge described in this area was that of new or combined roles. Job classifications and duty changes were only partially protected by union regulations as

management tried to circumvent existing rules when negotiations with unions were renewed. The crossing over of roles and combining of jobs were frequently mentioned as obstacles to performing daily routines that allow practitioners to serve the public interest.

What was evident in the research was that a great philosophical divide had been created between management and practitioners since corporations were allowed to expand. Practitioners were trying to maintain what many of them described as a “mission” to serve the public while management was interested only in market pressures and gaining advertising. Although most participants acknowledged that to some extent management always had leaned toward fiscal concerns and practitioners always toward content, the divide never had been greater than at this period.

Market Variations

The three media markets used for this study had many things in common. In the end, participant answers to the interview questions were similar and their contributions to the research essential. Tendencies emerged in each market, however, that showed differences in ownership style. Each added something unique to the overall study.

The Baltimore market was especially interesting. With one “owned and operated” station and three corporate-owned stations, it seems a typical market. However, the Sinclair-owned station is the company’s flagship and WBFF is operated like a locally owned station (the owners actually live in the city). Many of the management techniques and the overall mindset of the newsroom there were different than those of the other stations in this research. This provided a useful comparison for the entire study. The

practitioners from this locally owned station were still operating in the style of news-making that many of the participants from other stations said had been taken away from them. The difference was clear. Those employees answered more positively to most of the questions than other participants. Perhaps a research project comparing news practices of locally-owned stations with those at corporate-owned stations could provide more literature on the topic.

The Pittsburgh market is highly competitive with three of the four stations battling closely for ratings each day (the practitioners mentioned this repeatedly). With one “owned and operated” station and three corporate owned stations it appears quite similar to Baltimore (Hearst and Sinclair own stations in each). Pittsburgh served as an interesting test market because (by chance) I did not interview any reporters there. While the Pittsburgh participants’ answers were quite similar to those in the other markets, they were somewhat toned down, possibly because no reporters were included. It became clear in the analysis that reporters seemed to feel they were facing the most change.

Washington, D.C. was a market in the midst of a lot of change. As in the other markets, Washington, D.C. has one “owned and operated” station and three corporate-owned stations. The Gannett-owned station actually had ownership in the region (Virginia), but it was not run as a locally-owned station. The differences between that station and the locally owned station in Baltimore were extreme. Also, the Gannett-owned station was the first in the city to make all of its reporters solo report. This was the cause of great upheaval in the nation’s #8 ranked media market. Many veteran reporters retired or were bought out of their contracts. Participants at other D.C. stations said that their management was watching to see how the “one man band” reporting was going at

WUSA to see if it might be useful as an across the board decision to make. This apparently created a great deal of anxiety.

Limitations

While I see this study as the best way to truly understand what the effects of deregulation and other factors, such as changing technology, audience fragmentation and economic instability have been on practitioners of broadcast news, there are certain limitations. Clearly, I could not interview practitioners from every media market and geographic area within professional broadcasting. In-depth interviews require a great deal of time and analysis. Therefore representative markets had to be selected. I feel that the chosen markets offer a clear view of the patterns of change throughout the industry during the ten to fifteen years prior to the interviews.

One limitation is with the markets themselves. In the television business, media markets are viewed as large (generally those designated 1-40), medium (41-75) and small, (76 and below). This caused a dilemma in choosing markets. My specific interview requirements called for broadcasters with a minimum of fifteen years of active practitioner experience in the television news industry, with full activity between 1996 and 2006. This caused problems in finding subjects who met this qualification in smaller or, as I discovered, medium sized markets. Experience in the broadcast industry tends to lead to perpetual upward mobility in market size. While some practitioners choose to stay in smaller or mid-sized markets, the tendency is to move on after a few years of experience in order to earn a larger salary. The initial plan was to look at markets of

different size. However, an initial survey for potential interview candidates led to a realization that only a few would be available in any non large market areas (ten were needed for each market). This, in turn, led to a study that involves three different large market areas. Due to the experience of those interviewed, I do feel that this is sufficient to understand the thoughts and attitudes regarding the changes and trends during this time period.

A further limitation was a factor I can only describe as fear. In requesting interviews throughout the three chosen markets, I was often told about overwhelming interest in the study but that participation would be impossible due to fear of station retribution.³⁰ One male participant, in the Pittsburgh market, actually had to drop out due to his open fear (mid-interview) of answering the questions. Finding willing participants who matched all of the qualifications proved very difficult. Women were especially difficult to confirm for interviews. I cannot begin to speculate why, but the study ended up with twenty males and ten females, despite my requesting interviews (via telephone, email and in person) with many more females than males. In the end, I requested interviews with twenty-nine males and thirty-eight females. I do not think this harms the validity of the study due to the male to female ratio involved in the broadcast news business during the time period of 1996 to 2006. A two to one ratio of males to females was actually quite representative (Women in Media, 2008).

Finally, I must consider the many factors involved in the changes that the practitioners mentioned in the study. Much mention is made of deregulation, because

³⁰ Despite my offer to use a pseudonym, number, or carefully worded reference to any of their responses.

changes in ownership policy were what sparked interest in the study. However, the technological revolution, the economic downturn and considerable audience fragmentation all must be taken into consideration as part of the changes that took place during time after the Telecommunications Act of 1996. These many factors limit the ability of this study to pinpoint any single factor for the changes that practitioners largely describe as negative.

Conclusion

What was the impact of broadcast deregulation during a time of technological advancement and audience fragmentation on practitioners of broadcast television news?

The findings demonstrated in this study lead us to the original and overarching research question listed above. In keeping with the traditions of broadcast news, it seems appropriate to view the question from a wide point of view and then move into a detailed analysis.

This research may appear on the surface as a typical case study of changes in business practice coming along at a time of technological change and workers trying to adapt to those changes. Some of the workers adapt and move on while some struggle to adapt and have angry, bitter attitudes. Still others cannot adapt at all and leave the business entirely. Is that what is happening here, however? It is doubtful. Broadcast news is an industry of change. Many veterans involved in the study discussed the constant change in the business over their careers. Veterans of thirty years or more discussed shooting and editing film, then $\frac{3}{4}$ inch video tape, followed by smaller $\frac{1}{2}$ inch video tape,

then came digital tape and finally tapeless-digital files. Let us not forget they also had to move from typewriters to computers (in broadcast, using typewriters involved printing on heavy, three ply paper to be separated and then fed, by hand, into a crude teleprompting system), very heavy field cameras and full light kits with a separate audio unit (controlled by a no-longer-needed audio specialist) to small, lighter cameras with built in audio and a single head lamp. The technology in the broadcast news business has not only been in perpetual change, but has been embraced and, often times, viewed as a point of pride by practitioners.

Are we dealing with a profession of aging veterans dreaming of yesteryear? After all, isn't *everyone* doing more with less? Technology is changing the world. People are not even needed in certain jobs. The whole world is dealing with it. Adapt or die! No, there is more to it than that. As we have seen in the findings, the practitioners took a great deal of pride in serving the public. Many mentioned the words mission and service when they described their interest in broadcast news. What separates the changes we have discussed in the broadcast news business from other businesses is the perceived split in philosophy between veteran practitioners and expanded ownership groups (as discussed in the theory section). To practitioners, this is not just new technology, or even a new business model. It is the rapid destruction of a mission to serve the public interest, one that was protected by the government for over half a century and suddenly done away with.

To revisit the overarching research question, What was the impact of these changes on practitioners? First, practitioners feel the changes have forced them to uphold a philosophy of public service on their own. Laws that allowed expansion of ownership

caused a rapid selling off of locally owned stations that were run by families and small groups who made a profit by competing to serve the community better than the competition. Even the existing corporate ownership had to follow the same rules for ownership limits as the small group or family run businesses. The ensuing expanded corporate ownership caused a predictable shift in philosophy to a market model which found success by pleasing advertisers and producing news that appeals to a specific market demographic (Monica). Practitioners provided significant support for this belief in the individual market findings. If profits were down, staffs were cut or downsized by attrition to make sure there was still a profit. If equipment needed to be purchased, jobs were left open to make up for the cost. In short, practitioners said that ownership, management and even younger, less experienced employees showed concern only with producing news that appealed to a specific target demographic. Veteran practitioners, however, still said they believed in serving the public and community and were trying to uphold their mission in this highly constrained environment.

The findings show further evidence that make the practitioners' case by examination of the corporate owned, but locally-operated station in Baltimore that continued to operate the station locally amid corporate-operated stations throughout the rest of the city with out of town ownership. The practitioners at that locally-run station were generally happier than those at the other stations. The owners put the focus on the community. The staff was small, but motivated and participants from this station did not have a sharp philosophical split with ownership. Interestingly, the same ownership company is also the owner of the FOX affiliate in Pittsburgh that laid-off nearly the entire newsroom and outsourced its news operation to WPXI, further making the argument for

the practitioners that local ownership provides a sense of responsibility that is beneficial to the hometown.

In terms of specifics, practitioners said they were doing more with less on many levels. Staffs were smaller, the staff in the newsroom was younger and less experienced, job duties and descriptions were changing, reporters were being told to essentially learn new jobs or quit, fear of unemployment was rampant and many in the newsroom were disillusioned and did not think things would get better. Participants largely described these difficult changes as being directly related to expanded corporate ownership, which happened as a result of deregulation.

It is difficult to confirm that these unpopular changes practitioners describe were a direct result of broadcast deregulation. The time period studied was a time of significant change in the industry. An economic downturn was beginning and showing signs of being one of the worst in many years. Audiences were fragmented, going to cable outlets and many online sites and services. Furthermore, technology was changing so rapidly that many could only guess where the technology was going next. All of these factors likely came into play with these unpopular changes.

What we do know is that many of these changes would not have been possible without deregulation. Elimination of laws and the removal of caps on ownership allowed for drastic change. If stations were not allowed to do away with the practices they used under the fairness doctrine or community ascertainment, followed by the expansion and merging allowed through the lifting of ownership caps, change would have been greatly limited. Therefore, the practices of following the market model, described by McManus in chapter three, would have been difficult. Therefore, it is likely that broadcast

deregulation played a role in the impact on practitioners described in these interviews. However, it is the full scope of deregulation (changes in laws of practices and ownership) that resulted in having an effect. A lifting of the ownership laws without elimination of laws requiring service to the community would likely not have shown as much change.

So what? In these times of economic struggles why is it important to look at the case of local broadcast television news and see how the practitioners have been affected by some new laws? Many in America are unemployed; businesses are going overseas and sources for news are ever-expanding. If broadcast is not up to par, the public will turn away and find something new while broadcast fixes itself or dies off. The “so what” in this case is that everything cannot be run like a company selling widgets. An industry that existed for over sixty years on the premise that it would serve the public has been dramatically altered and many would argue for the worse. The goal of deregulation was to lift restrictions and create more competition. However, the ownership rule changes appear to have backfired in some ways and allowed oligopolies to be formed. This has largely taken away from the healthy competition that created a quality product for local communities throughout America. Network and cable news will always be prominent in the world of television, but they can only offer an outside look into the communities across America. Local broadcast television news provides an inside look for its viewers and we are all better served by it being protected from an outright sale to advertisers. If practitioners are put in a position where they can no longer serve their communities, local broadcast television news could disappear.

Finally, this research project was taken on several years ago in response to the numerous studies about ownership and the changing landscape of broadcast news. Nearly

all of them focused on ownership, corporations and new FCC policies. My goal was to look at how these much-talked about changes affected practitioners of local broadcast television news. I wanted to conduct a qualitative study to give them a voice and let their concerns be heard. I feel that I have accomplished that. However, this is only one study compared to hundreds of others that do not focus on, or include, practitioners. Much more research is needed to understand how these changes have affected a much larger group of broadcast practitioners. The body of research could benefit from more qualitative as well as quantitative studies on the subject. Certainly bringing management or even ownership into the conversation would be beneficial. Also, a study strictly on local television reporters could be fascinating. Reporters, as a group, were by far the unhappiest of all of those interviewed and a comprehensive study of their challenges could be groundbreaking. I see this project as the tip of the iceberg for research on the topic. It is largely untapped and the benefits from looking into it further seem limitless.

Appendix A

Newsroom Terminology

Basic Story Formats for Television News

The Reader (RDR)---This is the most basic form. Just involves an anchor and sometimes an over the shoulder graphic (OTS), full screen graphic, etc. Runs about 18-22 seconds.

The Voice-Over (VO)---This type of story usually runs about the same length (18-22 sec) and involves video. The anchor will appear on camera, usually for the first sentence and then the video will begin and run to the end of the story.

The Voice-Over/Sound On Tape (VO/SOT)---This is a more complex story involving the anchor, video and at least one sound bite. It is usually used when a story has some good information but not quite enough to make a full package. Like a VO it will typically begin with the anchor on camera, then go to video after (or during) the first sentence. At the appropriate time a soundbite will play that usually runs about 8-16 seconds.

Package (PKG)---A package is a pre-recorded story done in the field by a reporter. The anchor will usually introduce the package and then it will roll from Master Control. Packages usually run about 1:20-1:40.

Live Shots-Live shots are, as they say, live reports. The reporter is in the field for a live report, intro to a story (live lead and tag) or live Q & A.

Newsroom Practitioners

These are the professionals that I am most concerned with for this research, the daily news professionals who are not involved with management. Since management works together in close ties with ownership, it is important to speak with these practitioners in order to get a true sense of what is happening in the newsroom.

Assignment Editors are in charge of the daily crews. They organize and coordinate the activities of reporters and photographers. They also help the staff to keep track of ongoing stories and keep organized in terms of which stories need to be covered and when. They answer directly to the managing editor.

Producers organize and write the daily news programs. They are often referred to as “line-producers” because they work on what seems to be an assembly line of broadcasts. They time out shows, write the stories, give guidelines to reporters in terms of time allowed for stories and live shots, etc.

Reporters of all types (News, Sports, Weather, Health, Business, Science) are responsible for gathering and reporting the news. They put together news packages, perform live shots and interview witnesses and experts. Traditionally work with a photographer.

News Photographers/Videographers (usually called photographers or photogs) are in charge of shooting video and live shots for reporters. They coordinate locations, operate live trucks and work with the assignment desk to find locations of newsworthy events.

Video Editors edit the video that the photographers shoot in the field. These jobs often include other duties such as organizing the order of video clips for shows (whether it is tape or digital), creating show openings and working on promotional materials.

Technical Positions

The **Newscast Director** is in charge during a newscast. Directors make sure that the correct item is being shown live on the air. They coordinate all of the other control room positions (Audio, Technical Director, Graphics) to deliver a smooth newscast. They direct all video, audio and graphics to make sure they go on-air at the correct time.

The **Technical Director (TD)** is a practitioner who works hand in hand with the director. When the director orders that a certain camera go live on the air or that a certain piece of video be shown, the Technical Director makes it happen by operating a machine called a “switcher.” For this reason the Technical Director is often referred to as “The Switcher.”

The **Audio Engineer** makes sure that all levels are correct for anchors, reporters in the field and video. Engineers also assist in putting microphones on guests and anchors and take charge of the equipment used to do so.

Studio Camera Operators take cues from the director and ensure that shots of the anchors, meteorologists and guests in the studio are correct and in focus. In recent years, several of these positions have given way to a single individual who operates all of the cameras robotically. This is done with a joystick and focus screen, which closely resembles a video game.

Graphics Designers work in what is called the “art department.” They create graphics for shows (requested by producers and reporters). In recent years, this has become highly specialized work, often requiring advanced computer expertise.

Newsroom Entry level Positions (usually part-time)

Desk Assistants perform a variety of newsroom duties in conjunction with the Assignment editors. They answer phones, deliver scripts, make phone calls and sometimes write stories to help out the producer.

Associate Producers (APs) work directly with the producer of a particular show. They write stories, make phone calls and help coordinate reporters. This is often the training position for Producers as they break into the full-time ranks.

Some stations (usually in larger markets) will have paid **Writers**. They will generally write stories for several shows throughout the day. Their job is to help the producer prepare scripts of all types (RDR, VO, VO/SOT) so that the Producer can concentrate on the location and content of live reports and important packages.

Station Management Positions

The **General Manager (GM)** is in charge of all station operations. Everyone answers to the GM, but usually the News Director and Executive Producer are the closest in contact to be sure the desired style of news is put forth. General Managers usually come from the sales side of the station and have a strong understanding of financial issues. They are in close contact with ownership and often help decide what type of managers to hire in order to get the desired style of news.

The **News Director** is in charge of all news content. Directors hire other mid-level managers and oversee the entire operation. While mid-level managers are those closest in contact with News Directors, everyone in the newsroom will hear from directors as they often micro-manage the daily news routine.

Mid-Level Management:

The Managing Editor is in charge of the Assignment Editors and leads them in organizing the daily routines of reporters and photographers. Many will work with management to clarify what fits the particular station's style of news and make sure that all of the stories covered fall into that mold.

The **Executive Producer** (EP) is in charge of the entire producing crew. Executive producers sometimes help put shows together, but mostly will train the Producers to put shows together and write stories in the style of the station. They check all show rundowns before they go on-air and monitor Producers' work. They are often involved in the hiring process. They answer directly to the News Director.

The **Assistant News Director** works with the News Director and helps to manage the newsroom. They will often take the lead on a particular project or event coverage. In smaller markets these individuals will often have another job (such as anchor, reporter or Managing Editor). In larger markets Assistant News Directors are full-time managers and are often groomed to take over the News Directors spot when there is an opening.

Chief Photographer. This is a low to mid-level management position and often more of a union boss type situation. This person oversees the photographers and sometimes video editors. The News Director and other managers will speak to this person about the style of video the photographers are/should be getting. If there is a problem with one of the photographers, this person handles it.

Main Sections of the Television Station

The TV Station is divided into many rooms, each with a specific purpose:

Newsroom-This is where the Producers, Writers, Assignment Editors, and sometimes management representatives prepare the daily news.

Control Room-Used for the Director, Technical Director, Producer and Audio Engineer during a newscast. It has a wall of monitors and allows them to see what is going on in every location in use during a newscast.

Master Control-The Master Control room handles the station's on-air signal. Workers in this room are responsible for loading proper commercials and switching the signal over from network to local throughout the day/evening. It also houses other equipment that does not fit into or is too noisy for the Control Room.

Art Department-This is a room designated for graphics designers.

Tapes/Editing-This room houses the video editing gear and audio booths.

Green Room-A waiting/makeup room for guests.

Appendix B

Local Television Market Universe Estimates

Estimates as of January 1, 2013 and used throughout the 2012-2013 television season

Estimates are effective September 22, 2012

Rank Designated Market Area (DMA) TV Homes % of US

1	New York	7,384,340	6.468
2	Los Angeles	5,613,460	4.917
3	Chicago	3,484,800	3.052
4	Philadelphia	2,949,310	2.583
5	Dallas-Ft. Worth	2,588,020	2.267
6	San Francisco-Oak-San Jose	2,502,030	2.191
7	Boston (Manchester)	2,366,690	2.073
8	Washington, DC (Hagrstwn)	2,359,160	2.066
9	Atlanta	2,326,840	2.038
10	Houston	2,215,650	1.941
11	Detroit	1,845,920	1.617
12	Seattle-Tacoma	1,818,900	1.593
13	Phoenix (Prescott)	1,812,040	1.587
14	Tampa-St. Pete (Sarasota)	1,806,560	1.582
15	Minneapolis-St. Paul	1,728,050	1.513
16	Miami-Ft. Lauderdale	1,621,130	1.420
17	Denver	1,566,460	1.372
18	Cleveland-Akron (Canton)	1,485,140	1.301
19	Orlando-Daytona Bch-Melbrn	1,453,170	1.273
20	Sacramnto-Stkton-Modesto	1,387,710	1.215
21	St. Louis	1,243,490	1.089
22	Portland, OR	1,182,180	1.035
23	Pittsburgh	1,165,740	1.021
24	Raleigh-Durham (Fayetteville)	1,150,350	1.008
25	Charlotte	1,136,420	0.995
26	Indianapolis	1,089,700	0.954
27	Baltimore	1,085,070	0.950
28	San Diego	1,075,120	0.942
29	Nashville	1,014,910	0.889
30	Hartford & New Haven	996,550	0.873
31	Kansas City	931,320	0.816
32	Columbus, OH	930,460	0.815
33	Salt Lake City	917,370	0.803
34	Milwaukee	902,190	0.790
35	Cincinnati	897,890	0.786
36	San Antonio	881,050	0.772
37	Greenvll-Spart-Ashevll-And	846,030	0.741
38	West Palm Beach-Ft. Pierce	794,310	0.696
39	Grand Rapids-Kalmzoo-B.Crk	720,150	0.631
40	Las Vegas	718,990	0.630

(The Nielson Company, USA, 2012).

Appendix C

Coding Categories

Coding Categories

News Philosophy/Style-(Black)

24 Hour News

Filling Space

Story Count

Growing competition/Choices

Cultivation of style and brand

Staffing-(Red)

Shrinking staffs/Attrition

Shrinking staffs/Layoffs

Less Experienced help

Money-(Green)

Stations financial issues

Cost Cutting

Profit Margins-(Sub-Category-Light Green)

-Meeting Bottom Line

-Growing Bottom Line

-Changing Mindset about profits

Job Satisfaction-(Midnight Blue)

Job Security

Workload

Time Issues

More with less

Morale-(Sub-Category-Bright Blue)

- Stress/Pressure
- Burnout
- Disillusionment
- Happiness

Fear (Grey)

- Of losing jobs
- Of losing sources/Money

Ownership-(Orange)

Non-Local

Management-(Light Brown)

Consultants

Hierarchy (Sub-Category-Dark Brown)

- Bosses answer to Bosses**
- Who's calling shots**

Technology-(Purple)

- Changes**
- Internet/Websites/blogging**

Professionalism-(Teal)

Public Responsibility

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