ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. The research questions guiding this study were: 1.) What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast? 2.) How do interests shape the decision-making process? and 3.) How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?

Data for this qualitative case study were collected through observation, interviews and document analysis. The observation lasted for one news cycle. A site pre-visit and a pilot study were also conducted. Interviews were conducted with the entire news staff including the news director, associate producer, and three reporters, and they spanned three days immediately following the observation.

This study mapped the process by which news is created including the selection of the stories, organization of the stories, reporting of the stories, writing and editing of the stories, and broadcasting of the program. In this process, four interests were uncovered by using the constant comparative method of data analysis. The first interest is the pursuit of profitability, which includes generating income by attracting and retaining an audience as well as curbing expenses
by limiting resources. Other interests include the reinforcement of prevailing cultural norms and values, reinforcement of the rural narrative, and maintaining an appearance of objectivity. Last, three significant areas of power relationships were identified and discussed including economic, legal/governmental, and social.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, by way of the calculated construction of the broadcast by the participants, viewers are presented with a picture of their community that is widely accepted by the majority of the audience base in the area, and as a result, hegemony influences the decision-making process. Second, power relationships and interests frame the participants’ decision making in the production of television news content. Finally, in spite of a dedication to the appearance of objectivity, television news defines the educational needs of its audience by selectively presenting certain stories in a certain order to organize the viewers’ attention and channel debate.

INDEX WORDS: adult education, critical media studies, cultural studies, media, media literacy, organizational politics, organizational power, program planning, qualitative case study, television news
THE OTHER SIDE OF MEDIA LITERACY: HOW INTERESTS AND POWER RELATIONS SHAPE THE PRODUCTION OF TELEVISION NEWS

by

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THE OTHER SIDE OF MEDIA LITERACY: HOW INTERESTS AND POWER RELATIONS SHAPE THE PRODUCTION OF TELEVISION NEWS

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“[Television] can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box. There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance, and indifference. This weapon of television could be useful” (Murrow, 1958).

One of the most common ways that people use the media to learn about the world is by watching television news. As with other media, television news allows us to see and hear things we might not otherwise experience. Thanks to technological breakthroughs, we can see the ups and downs of foreign markets every day on TV, we can learn how to take better care of our health, and we can see wars being fought in our living rooms. In fact, the most recent biennial news consumption study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2004), found that 59 percent of Americans say they regularly watch the local news in their area, a number that has remained relatively consistent since 2000. Network and local TV news viewership has been largely stable since 2002, with local news broadcasts dominating as the source of news information.

However, television news is not simply a summary of important events in the city or the world for the day. Guy (2006) notes that “whoever controls the medium is in control of the message” (p. 96). The way events are selected, depicted, scripted, and told
is based upon the work of human beings. Producers, directors, reporters, camerapersons, editors, and others all affect the final product on the evening news. They decide whose stories will be told and not told, who will be quoted, which quotes will be used, which images will be seen, and how the story will be constructed, based upon their own training, interests, worldviews, experiences, and sense of justice. Additionally, besides the noble public service of delivering the day’s important events and happenings to the public, news crews routinely face pressures like helping to make a profit for their station, keeping costs down, keeping ratings up, and producing a clean, professional-looking newscast filled with interesting stories produced sometimes in a couple hours or less (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). As a result, television news is filled with bias, various implicit assumptions, cultural norms, and hidden agendas related to the world that the stories purport to cover.

Background of the Problem

Media literacy is an especially important field for consumers of television news because people believe what they see and hear on the news. Although news credibility in recent years has generally been declining, 63 percent of people (N=3000) in a recent U.S. study gave their local television news a score of 3 or 4 (of 4) in believability, while 25 percent of people said they believe all or most of what is broadcast on local television news (Pew Research Center, 2004). Kellner (1997) suggests that perhaps we are learning more than we expect from media sources like the TV. He says “[W]e are often not aware that media narratives and spectacles themselves are a form of education, imparting cultural knowledge, values, and shaping how we see and live our social worlds.”
Limited research has been done about media literacy in the field of adult education, however, and most of what has been presented has focused on teaching adult learners to be more critical consumers of media. One of the best known articles, published in a general education journal (Brookfield, 1986), describes television’s presentation of bias and advocates critical consumption of media messages through techniques that foster “ideological detoxification” (p. 151). Jarvis (1985) addresses the topic from a sociological perspective, and dedicates a section in his article to the implications for adult education that primarily focuses on encouraging “disputation of interpretation of facts and even methodological inquiry about the generation of such facts” (p. 14). Graham (1989) argues for a more media-literate citizenry by way of an analysis of romance fiction and television news. More recently, Sargant (2004) wrote that while traditionally the media literacy movement focuses on teaching children to respond critically to media, it is important not to neglect adults. Shor (1993) conducted a survey of adult students and found that critical thinking was suppressed by a reliance on television news. And Guy (2006) discusses the global nature of media and its effect on mainstream culture, arguing that increased globalization can lead to cultural homogeneity and predictability in cultural taste.

No research in adult education, however, has emphasized the production and analysis of media texts as the main thrust of the work. Levine (2001) and Ytreberg (2000) note that this absence is a problem across many disciplines and that the studies that are done in other areas are often multi-disciplinary. Ytreberg (2000) says, “Whereas studies of text production have been few to date, they are scattered within several sub-disciplines. We find them in journalism research, in production studies, and in research

When discussions about media production are found in scientific literature, the media are often portrayed as entities looking to corrupt the minds of an unsuspecting public. Guy (2006) notes that “By the 1950s mass [media] consumption had become a reality and with it increased scholarly interest on the part of social theorists in problems of hegemony and domination in advanced capitalist societies” (p. 100). In fact, as a central thrust in critical media studies, hegemony provides a useful lens for a critical analysis of media. It can be used to uncover whether “a dominant, authoritative set of meanings and practices” (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003, p. 287) is embedded in the texts and if it is, its origins can be investigated. Hegemony provides a lens through which to critically interpret results from a study such as mine.

Media texts are originated, or produced, by people like reporters, producers, editors, who work in social groups at jobs to develop and deliver each day’s broadcast. One way to look at these kinds of group processes is through the theoretical framework provided by Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996, 2006) to understand the politics of educational planning. Although this framework has traditionally been used to study formal educational programs, it can be used as a model to study mass media production
as a form of adult education program planning. Using this perspective, a news program is
treated as an educational program and the viewers are students who learn various explicit
and implicit “lessons” about the day’s events and society in general. By studying the
production of the educational program from this vantage point, we have a theoretical
framework at our disposal that can be used to investigate how power relationships and
interests affect the broadcast’s final outcome.

The Cervero and Wilson model has been used by scholars to examine how
planning affects practical actions in the development of educational programs in myriad
different venues. Some recent studies using the framework include Carter’s (1996) study
about how people’s interests affect empowerment planning in a health promotion
colaboration, and Brown, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey’s (2000) study of how the societal
position of African-American women affects their experiences when teaching
mathematics to adults in postsecondary institutions. Barrett, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey
(2003) used the framework to describe the career experiences of black human resource
developers. Sessions and Cervero (2001) examined power relationships in the planning of
used the model to study the dynamics of planning in a state’s cooperative extension
service. Archie-Booker, Cervero, and Langone (1999) examined the politics of planning
culturally relevant AIDS prevention education for African-American women using this
frame. Umble, Cervero, and Langone (2001) did a case study to examine a continuing
education course in public health paying particular attention to the distinction between
meta-negotiation and substantive negotiation. Burns and Cervero (2004) used the model
to identify political issues negotiated in pastoral practice. Drennon and Cervero (2002)
conducted a study using the model to understand the struggles that facilitators of practitioner inquiry groups in adult literacy education face when enacting democratic practices. Kim (2005) used the model in a dissertation examining the managerial development program of a Korean insurance company while Penland (2004) examined the impact of intercultural factors on the planning of theological education in the Dominican Republic. What these studies broadly have found is that educational program development is a political process where the power relationships and interests of the people doing the planning affect program outcomes.

One can argue that like the production of a formal educational program, the production of a local television newscast is framed by the power relationships and interests of those people involved in its creation. Drawing on critical social theory, Cervero and Wilson provide a way to analyze planners’ socially structured capacity to act – their power – within planning and organizational contexts. The authors point out that planning is social, but how planners interact in these social processes is inherently political because the people involved have varying interests and amounts of power based upon their position in the organization, training, and expertise.

Statement of the Problem

A majority of adults have been shown to rely on the television news for information about the world, and they purport to believe a majority of what they see and hear (Pew Research Center, 2004). Because media literacy scholars realize that the media are often a source of implicit values, cultural knowledge, and social norms, work in the field of media literacy has primarily been concentrated around teaching consumers to be more critical viewers of television programs.
While the existing literature (Brookfield, 1986; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Kellner, 1997) does recognize that television news is shaped by dominant interests, the lopsided focus of scholarly inquiry on the consumption of media texts has left a gap in the literature. The problem this research seeks to address is how dominant interests become a part of the text of local television news through the planning process.

By understanding local television news as an educational program produced by human beings – writers, editors, reporters, producers, camerapersons – who work together to negotiate decisions to produce what they believe is a fair and balanced view of the world, we can use the lens provided by Cervero and Wilson’s (1994, 1996, 2006) program planning model to understand whose interests are represented and how those interests become part of the media message.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast?
2. How do interests shape the decision-making process?
3. How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?

Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. First, this study provides a more complete understanding of media literacy and practice. By providing a close examination of the production of a mass media product, it gives adult educators greater insight into how and why media texts are developed. This insight can provide the
basis for future scholarship in areas like media literacy, adult education, media studies, production studies, journalism, mass communication, and business.

Additionally, by utilizing Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) theory to explicitly outline the power relationships and the interests of the stakeholders in the local news production process, this study extends our understanding of the Cervero and Wilson perspective on program planning. Until this point, there has been no study of the application of this model to a television program.

Third, this study contributes to the scant existing studies about the production aspects of media. Ytreberg (2000) notes that although “studies of text production and the text are central to the idea of integrating, of unifying media research as a discipline” the “number of studies that focus on text production and the text are rather few, at least relative to the number of studies that combine a focus on the text with studies of reception processes” (p. 53). This dissertation adds to the scientific literature base of production-focused studies.

There is practical significance to the study also. By providing a more complete understanding of media literacy and practice, adult educators can produce better media literacy programs. Particularly, faculty in higher education who teach media literacy in stand-alone programs or those in the fields of speech communication, mass communication, or adult literacy who incorporate media literacy into their curricula can better illustrate how the implicit and explicit messages from television news make their way into our popular culture. By providing an understanding of how these media texts are produced, adult educators can teach not only that certain interests are part of the message, but that those interests are an intractable part of the program’s genesis. This
understanding will fortify a student’s understanding of the need for critical consumption of media.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. In this chapter, I review literature relevant to the study. To help the reader contextualize the material I will present, I first present a review of literature related to mass media in American society. Next, I present a review of literature about critical media studies that presents hegemony as one way that dominant ideologies are expressed and perpetuated in society. Third, because I am using Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) theory as a framework for understanding the negotiation of power and interests in the planning of television news programs, I will review the program planning literature in adult education ending with a discussion of the Cervero and Wilson theory that includes a critique and scholarly applications.

Mass Media in Society

This section examines media in our society. First, this section discusses the nature of mass media. Next, it discusses how the nature of mass media has changed in recent times. Third, it covers what adults learn from the media and then how adults learn from the media. Last, this section discusses why and how adults should become critical consumers of mass media.
The nature of mass media

Unlike today, centuries ago, the nature of mass media meant that getting and using information was a major problem for almost all people. Knowledge was power, and it was controlled by the elites: those with wealth, influence, and/or education. Most news and information was transmitted orally, and it took weeks or months to reach people who had no other means to get it. People often did not have direct access to their leaders, nor could they read – even if there were a way for them to buy or borrow books.

At that time, media were mostly used for interpersonal and private communications. Public communication like folklore was passed along by oral traditions, and humans relied on each other to deliver news from one person to another, from one town to another. Media are defined by Altheide (1985) as “any social or technological procedure or device that is used for the selection, transmission, and reception of information” (p. 15). Potter (2004) defines media as the technological means of disseminating messages. For our purposes, media are the means by which information is transmitted from a sender to a receiver.

We often hear people refer to mass media. The difference between mass media and non-mass media depends on the motives of the sender (Potter, 2004). In a mass medium, “the sender’s main intention is to condition the audiences into a ritualistic mode of exposure” (Potter, 2004, p. 44). The aim for the sender, he says, is to “get people into a position where they will regularly be exposed to their messages” (p. 44). One way senders attempt to secure this regular exposure is by making messages efficient, which means they cost the audience as little unwanted time, energy, money, and other resources as possible while they deliver the message to the greatest number of people. Mass media
are the means by which a message comes from an individual or small group to a larger body through some vehicle. A message is a theme or idea communicated in writing, speech or by signals.

Generally, mass media are classified as print media -- which include newspapers, books, and magazines -- and electronic media -- which include radio, films, television (cable, network, and local), Internet, and CDs among others. The mass media consist of vehicles for the delivery of information. For example, a magazine is a mass medium and *U.S. News & World Report* or *Ladies Home Journal* or *Road and Track* are vehicles. Television is a mass medium while *The Price is Right* or *Law & Order* or *The Evening News with Dan Rather* are vehicles. “Vehicles” are also sometimes called “outlets.”

How the nature of mass media has changed in recent times

The nature of media has changed. First, this section will discuss the degree to which the volume of mass media has grown in recent times. Next, it will discuss how, because of the increased volume, messages have become shorter and meanings have become compressed. Last, this section will discuss how the resulting change has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between different functions of mass media.

In an attempt to win audiences, senders produce a lot of messages. Today, we suffer from information overload. Brookfield (1986) referred to modern television as “less a river of messages, symbols, and images into which we occasionally take a dip than an ocean in which we perpetually swim” (p. 152). In fact, research by Lyman and Varian (2003) shows that in one year, in the United States alone, 141,901 new book titles are published; 10,170 newspapers are published; 16,615 mass market and trade periodicals are published; 10,632 scholarly periodicals are published; and 11,581
newsletters are published. These numbers – U.S. production – account for slightly more than 10 percent of the world's original information flow in these mass media, so worldwide the numbers are much larger. In American broadcast media, 13,261 radio stations produced 19.8 million hours of original programming and 1,194 television stations produced 3.6 million hours of original programming in 2002. Worldwide, radio and television stations produced 70 million and 31 million hours of original programming respectively (Lyman & Varian, 2003). Clearly, the problem today is no longer about how to get access to information. Even keeping up with new information is a futile effort. Watching only the original television programming produced in 2002 would take more than 3,538 years – with no breaks.

A greater challenge to consumers today comes from learning how to use information that is meaningful to us. The challenge is more difficult than it sounds, because there is a catch: Messages have become shorter, and the sheer volume of information has affected its quality. The average American household has the TV on for more than 49 hours per week (Boyse, McCuiston & Song, n.d.). Although that number has grown steadily almost every year from 1970, so has the amount of time dedicated to commercials, which means that fewer minutes per hour are actually filled with programming. In 2002, commercial clutter had climbed to an all-time high in three day parts including more than 18 minutes per hour in early morning, nearly 21 minutes per hour in daytime television, and more than 17 minutes during the local news hour (Association of National Advertisers, 2002). The shorter programming time increases the likelihood that we will attend to an entire message, but the length forces the messages to be superficial. People are often left to try to fit sparse bits of information into their own
experiences which may or may not produce an accurate representation of the intended message or of the depicted event, in the case of a news story.

Additionally, the ability of audience members to distinguish between advertising, entertainment, and information is becoming more difficult. Infomercials and advertorials look like information, but they are really paid advertising. Entertainment frequently includes product placement, so that a product’s assets are integrated into the show as much as the show’s characters. For example in summer 2004, the USA Network broadcast a movie called *The Last Ride*, which was written for the Pontiac GTO and paid for by General Motors. Variety Magazine called it, “little more than a two-hour ad to sell muscle cars” (Goodman & Rushkoff, 2004). As the number and variety of messages grow, we are increasingly subjected to more subtle and influential worldviews.

**What adults learn from the mass media**

Mass media affect what we learn. Traditional behaviorism asserts that people can learn new behaviors when they are presented with certain stimuli, respond to the stimuli, and receive rewards or punishment. Obviously though, trying everything before one learns about it is very inefficient. Instead, we can learn by watching others, and the mass media are good tools for that. For example, many people watch cooking shows on television to learn new recipes without having to experiment themselves, and many novice cooks also watch to learn cooking techniques.

Cooking is not the only thing that can be learned by watching others on TV. By watching television, adults also can learn what is happening in society, and we can learn how to react. Kellner (1997) called television the dominant producer of cultural symbolism. Through the media, we can explore our fantasies and test out alternative
realities. Soap operas show us that stoic endurance prevails through suffering, and crime dramas show us that justice prevails over injustice. By seeing and hearing these kinds of texts again and again, we learn how to think and act in a manner acceptable to our society. We also learn that there is pain and punishment suffered for going against societal norms. Cortés (1981) recognizes this anecdotal understanding of the world as a “massive, ongoing, informal curriculum of families, peer groups, neighborhoods, churches, organizations, institutions and mass media, and other socializing forces that educate all of us throughout our lives” (p. 13). Additionally, Brookfield (1987) asserts that in adulthood, one of the main functions of television is as a reinforcing agent of political socialization. He says, “Television inevitably reflects and mirrors the dominant values of the society in which it operates. Views of the world and interpretations of political events that would be considered radical, or at least strongly divergent from the values and attitudes of the dominant culture, receive much less expression than mainstream consensual outlooks” (p. 187).

_How adults learn from the mass media_

The media do not overtly aim to spread disinformation or to distort the truth, and they do not have an unlimited capacity to directly affect behavior in themselves (White, 1983). Rather Brookfield (1986) observes that the media socialize in a “more subtle and insidious manner, frequently as a latent consequence of the way they organize their production of messages” (p. 152). This section will discuss the nature of knowledge and how adults learn from the mass media.

As a human endeavor, the creation of knowledge is arguably individualistic and subjective. Much of the information in our society requires interpretation to give it
meaning. For example, a student might have scored 92 percent on her test. Her teacher likely will say she is a “good” student. However if most of the class scored 98 percent, the teacher’s word choice could be referring to the fact that the student generally shows up and tries hard, not to her performance on this test. Jarvis (1985) maintains that this example is like much of the information in our society: relatively meaningless without interpretation. Often a fact is presented along with the interpretation of the fact “as if the interpretation was part of the fact itself. Additionally, various forms of belief knowledge tend to be presented as if they were logical or empirical knowledge, and herein lies some of the dangers of the information society” (Jarvis, 1985, p.12).

The consumption of knowledge is part of our interaction with the mass media. Adults learn from what they see and hear in the mass media. Unlike some other kinds of learning, the television does not require attendance in a formal classroom, however. It does not require its students to bring a pencil and to take notes, and there are no tests or papers to write. So then what kind of learning happens in “schools” like living rooms and sports bars? As our increasingly technological world grows more busy and fragmented, we are likely to see more learning in less conventional and formal ways – particularly by adults. The mass media provide one means by which this can happen.

Informal and incidental learning is a way that people learn from the mass media. Informal and incidental learning typically refers to the kind of learning that comes from the experiences of everyday living. Marsick and Watkins (1990) define informal and incidental learning by contrasting it with formal learning:

Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes
incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity. ... Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it. (p. 12)

There are many reasons one might watch or read the news. Some people do want to learn about what is happening in the world. Others read the paper or tune in to relax. There may be other reasons as well. The people who consume media with some intentionality in their purpose are likely engaging in informal learning. Informal learning is usually done on purpose, but it is not highly structured (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). On the other hand, incidental learning is often learning that is taken for granted, tacit or unconscious (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). This is the kind of learning that is likely to happen when people tune into the news or other program to relax or be entertained, and in the process they may learn about various implicit assumptions, cultural norms, and hidden agendas related to the world in which they live.

Informal learning and incidental learning are unstructured and can be messy. Marsick and Watkins (2001) point out “[I]t is easy to become trapped by blind spots about one’s own needs, assumptions, and values that influence the way people frame a situation, and by misperceptions about one’s own responsibility when errors occur” (p. 31). People are social creatures, and as part of a society, we hold certain assumptions
about the world in which we live. Interpretations of the things we see and read and our resulting actions and reactions are highly influenced by the constructed understanding we hold about the world. Therefore informal and incidental learning activities may be easily distorted.

Because of this possibility of distortion, critical reflection should also be fostered as a means by which adults can learn from the mass media. Critical reflection asks learners to examine the ways dominant values and social systems affect they way they think and live (Brookfield, 2000). Someone who was reflecting critically on the network news would pay attention to the inherent messages and ask him/herself whether the messages reflected societal assumptions that might be taken as “common sense” and whether those messages apply to him/her. In other words, someone engaging in critical reflection might find ways “to recognize the hegemonic aspects of dominant cultural values and to understand how self-evident renderings of the 'natural' state of the world actually bolster the power and self-interest of unrepresentative minorities” (Brookfield, 1996, p. 376).

Studies of critical reflection have shown that it is possible for learners to be quite adept at the practice in some areas of their life while they show no critical awareness of repressive features in other areas of their life. For this reason, consumers of mass media should be encouraged to develop skills in the practice of media literacy, which makes great use of the practice of critical reflection.

*Why and how adults should become critical consumers of mass media*

Whether it is by reassuring us that the authorities have things under control or by portraying the workings of American government as inconsequential to most people, mass
media often characterize life as myriad structures of oppression and privilege. Cortés (1994) says mass media are particularly powerful, especially in the development of attitudes including prejudices and stereotypes. For these reasons and those mentioned previously, adults should learn to become critical consumers of mass media who attend to their own needs and interests.

Critical users of media realize that modern technologies, including everything from newspapers to the Internet, may produce hidden or unintended consequences that do not foster a just and democratic society (Brookfield, 1986; Guy, 2006; Potter, 2004). A critical mind can help consumers to contextualize the production and use of multimedia and information technologies within modern social relations and contexts, to view negative aspects and effects from a perspective serving their own best interests, and to attempt to understand today’s media in a positive environment of education and social transformation.

But how can one become a critical consumer of mass media? One solution is media literacy. Media literacy can be defined a number of ways. The Center for Media Literacy (2003) says it is a framework for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media. Silverblatt and Eliceiri (1997) call it a “critical thinking skill that enables audiences to decipher the information that they receive through the channels of mass communications and empowers them to develop independent judgments about media content” (p. 48). Media literacy is defined by Brookfield (1987) as the ability to possess some critical awareness of television’s capacity for distortion in its supposedly objective reporting of events in the “real” world. He says media literate adults appreciate the potential for selective distortion in television’s depictions of political life. Guy (2006) calls critical media literacy “a necessary step toward addressing the underlying issues of
control, homogenization, and conformity produced by the media” (pp. 110-111). Those who are media literate do not presume that a news story on television is necessarily objective, and they are aware that apparently neutral stories can be filled with all kinds of judgments, biases, and examples of selective interests.

As they interact with complex social and cultural contexts, critical consumers are better able to decide which positions are most meaningful to them. They have found that developing an understanding of how certain viewpoints become part of the media’s messages enables them to curb the imbalance of power regarding information flow. People who are media literate have developed decoding filters and strategies whereby the content of news broadcasts, current affairs programs, and coverage of the political world can be assessed critically. Brookfield (1986, 1987), Dow (1996), and Potter (2004) say that viewers can and often do ignore or actively oppose television’s representation of the world. In fact, one of the aims of media literacy is to enable individuals to perceive the factors determining their beliefs as culturally constructed and ripe for what Brookfield (1986) has called “ideological detoxification” (p. 151). Brookfield coined this term to refer to the process “by which adults are weaned away from dependence on, and adherence to, simplistic explanations of complex political reality” (p. 151).

In conclusion, mass media and the messages they bring are growing at a faster rate than ever. In order to keep up with the flow of information and help insure that the messages delivered provide information that tell us what we need to know about the world, adults must become more critical audience members. Whether we watch TV news to find out what is happening in the world around us or simply to relax and be entertained, we must learn to better recognize the implicit messages about our society that
are embedded in media so that we can develop the skills needed to make the best use of the information we consume.

Critical Media Studies and Hegemony Theory

A critical view of media studies looks at oppositional pedagogies of representation as a way to expose hidden social meanings and manipulations in mass media. It also examines possibilities of empowerment in the mass media. As such, critical media studies comes out of neo-Marxist ideology, which is specifically concerned with authority, control, and the injustices that accompany industrial and corporate capitalism (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Because this research study critically examines power relationships and interests in the production of media, an understanding of critical media studies and hegemony is particularly useful. The first part of this section of the literature review begins with a description of traditional Marxism and explores how more modern or neo-Marxist views of Marx’s ideas have influenced ideas like hegemony as a conceptual ideological model. Next, it explores media as one arena where hegemony is enshrined as societal norms and implicit values are acculturated as “common sense.” Then this section explores whether a critical understanding of media might allow consumers to more easily negotiate meanings in media texts and oppose mainstream interests portrayed there. The second part of this section critically reviews five ways hegemony is manifest in the production of television news media through a close examination of Herman and Chomsky’s (2002) “Propaganda Model.”
Hegemony as a conceptual ideological model

In the simplest sense, traditional Marxism holds that our lives and our places in them are determined by capital (Marx, 1976). Money affects the people, places and things with which we interact – and how we interact with them. Everything from the friends we have, the jobs we hold, and our ideas have a basis in capital and the means for producing capital.

Based on this understanding, Marx divides the society into two layers or levels. The bottom layer – the base of society – is comprised of the means of production and the relations of production. This is the layer upon which everything grows. It is composed of material production, money, objects, the relations of production, and the development of productive forces. This is the palpable and tangible world as well as the economic relations that this world generates.

The upper level – the superstructure – is determined by the base, and it is where we find politics, art, and culture as well as ideological institutions, social relations, and ideas. This is the part of society that affects legal and political expressions; forms of consciousness, especially if they express a particular class view; and the process by which one becomes aware of economic conflicts.

Traditional views of Marxism hold that this is a one-way relationship. The economics always provide the basis for the ideas by which a society lives and works. In fact, Marx (1970) wrote, “The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (p. 3).
Some (particularly more modern) Marxist writers and philosophers (Althusser, 1990; Gramsci, 1971; Williams, 1977) are not convinced that the bottom-up relationship is quite so rigid. One example of a variation on Marx’s original outline is the concept of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony is an idea developed by Antonio Gramsci, a neo-Marxist revolutionary and founding member of the Italian Communist party who was arrested by the Italian Fascists in 1926 and imprisoned until his death. While he was in prison, he developed the idea to explain a process by which dominant groups work to maintain their power and protect their common interests, not through force, but through the apparent willingness of subordinate classes who accept the cultural tenets and definitions reinforced by the status quo. Gramsci believed that class struggle always involved ideas and ideologies at the onset, and that economic crises alone would not subvert capitalism. Gramsci (1971) describes hegemony as

“spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

Hegemony has two main ingredients. First, hegemony is negotiable. Leadership operates through a process of give and take, of hegemony and counterhegemony, where those who are subordinated are given some latitude to determine the formation of particular texts. Like the mother who tells her child he can have either peas or carrots, without saying that he must eat a vegetable, so are the routines and practices inherent in various relationships that are based on the content and structure of knowledge in society.
Second, hegemony requires consent. This consent is accomplished by diffusion of the dominant ideology through social institutions including education, the media, popular culture, religion, law, and science until it becomes a generally accepted everyday reality. By this process, one group of people accepts as normal, natural, and in no need of explanation the attitudes, values, beliefs, and assumptions that are in the interests of another group of people. Acosta-Alzuru (2003) notes that hegemony does not just passively exist as a form of dominance, but rather “through negotiation and consent, a group of rules of conduct, signifying practices, and meanings are naturalized, becoming common sense” (p. 287).

In his seminal work about ideology in media studies, Hall (1982) and other contemporary scholars (Brookfield, 1986; Dow, 1996) have shown that the media is one arena where consumers of popular culture texts have a considerable capacity to negotiate meanings within various texts. Consumers may accept, negotiate or oppose the dominant reading of a text based on individual social differences (Dow, 1996; Hall, 1980). In this way, the stuff of our lived existence provides the means by which we can judge the relative truth of the representations we consume in the media (Dow, 1996) and gives us tools with which we, as individuals, might work to oppose mainstream interests in the media.

However, hegemony is constantly challenging individual interpretations by channeling conflict. Cultural norms are not easily changed, and concepts that have been culturally enshrined as “common sense” are not easily altered. An example might look something like this: When a reporter starts to question the President’s military record, the mainstream response is not to ask what brought about the questions, but rather whether
the documents used to question the record were authentic. In his landmark work about the
hegemonic process in television, Gitlin (1979) says, “To put it another way: major social
conflicts are transported into the cultural system, where the hegemonic process frames
them, form and content both, into compatibility with dominant systems of meaning” (p.
264).

So, does that mean that as a society, we are left to the controlling whims of some
almighty other? Is it that we have met the enemy, and the enemy is us? Yes and no. Some
scholars (Brookfield, 1986; Dow, 1996; Hall, 1982) have argued that mass media do
reflect the values, assumptions, and stereotypes of the dominant culture. Rarely is
material presented that opposes mainstream public opinion or governmental actions,
particularly in a capitalistic economy, but neither does most mass media wholly embrace
prevailing structures and ideologies. Gitlin (1982) sums it up by saying, “The hegemonic
walls can be relocated. What does not change is the existence of those walls, nor the
existence of art and mind battering up against them” (p. 240).

*The role hegemony has played in critical media studies*

As a process by which society works to maintain its survival by assuming control
over consumers, hegemony has a prominent place in the critical study of media. This
section will further describe the role hegemony plays in critical media studies and offer
analysis of that role by close examination of Herman and Chomsky’s (2002) “propaganda
model” (p. ix). This model shows how the media form a decentralized and non-
conspiratorial, but powerful, system to mobilize consensus and frame public debate while
giving the appearance of democratic consent. This is hegemony in action. It should be
noted that this discussion emphasizes media structure and performance, not media’s
effects on an audience, since the focus of this dissertation research was on the planning and production of a media program.

The mass media is not immune from the aim of most other enterprises in American society: to make money and to secure influence. Herman and Chomsky (2002) note that “among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them” (p. xi). Working in the (hegemonic) interests of their financiers, the media aim to build and maintain control over the public’s values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas.

In their book, *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (2002) describe the “propaganda model” (p. xi). The model describes how news must pass through one or more of five different “filters” which work to emphasize the prevailing interests of the rich and powerful. Because the model explains how the media’s structure works to help perpetuate the status quo and common sense of our society, it can help to understand the role hegemony plays in critical media studies.

*The first filter: ownership.*

The first filter, ownership, notes that most major media outlets are owned by a few large, wealthy corporations intent on making a profit. Because of this, hegemony is reinforced by a lack of diversity in control, and therefore in opinion, which is particularly disconcerting to critical media theorists. Bagdikian (2000) notes that despite more than 25,000 media outlets in the United States, the control of most of the daily newspapers, television, magazines, books, and motion pictures is held in large part by 23 multinational corporations. Herman and Chomsky (2002) count 24, with only a small percentage in a single media sector (i.e., all holdings in newspapers, television, etc.). These groups have a
special stake in maintaining the status quo because of their size and wealth, and also because, with their strategic positions in society, they can exercise considerable power over the information that people receive and therefore what they think, feel, and believe.

The concentration of control may effectively be even tighter. Herman and Chomsky (2002) point out that media are tiered – as measured by prestige, resources, and outreach – and the top tier may contain as few as ten constituents. According to Herman and Chomsky (2002) “it is this top tier, along with the government and wire services, that defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media, and thus for the general public” (pp. 4-5). In fact, approximately 80 percent of the international news in circulation today comes from the four major Western wire services: the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agence-France-Presse (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Because of deadline and time pressures, it is not uncommon for various agencies to share information when they construct stories and story ideas.

The second filter: funding.

The second filter, funding, notes that the outlets derive the majority of their funding from advertising. As profit-oriented businesses selling a product – namely the attention of the audience – to other businesses who are advertisers, the model expects them to publish news which would reflect the desires and values of those client businesses. Because of this, hegemonic control is reinforced by the outlets’ tendency to act in the interests of their advertisers, rather than in the interest of their audience. Critical media theorists are likely to consider this lack of interest in the consumer an injustice.
The most attractive thing to a media outlet is an advertiser with deep pockets, and the most attractive thing to an advertiser is a media outlet with a large audience, particularly if the audience is interested in what the advertiser is selling. To mass media outlets intent on capturing an audience, reliable readers and/or viewers in large numbers is crucial. According to Gitlin (1977) in another oft-cited work about television and the culture of politics, “You get a mass audience by, in a sense, manufacturing it. That is, you manufacture an audience that is reliable: that watches reliably, that thinks and feels (‘responds’) reliably, and finally, that buys (‘behaves’) reliably” (p. 790). He further explains that media formats promote a passive, all-consuming audience by featuring certain people on certain programs, turning those people into heroes, and by developing programs whose stories climax right before a commercial to keep people tuned in.

What if people do not stay tuned in? The financial repercussions of lost market share can be great. Herman and Chomsky (2002) note that “For a television network, an audience gain or loss of one percentage point in the Nielsen (television) ratings translates into a change in advertising revenue of from $80 to $100 million a year, with some variation depending on measures of audience ‘quality’” (p. 16). Holding onto an audience is so important, in fact, that large corporate advertisers rarely sponsor programs that engage in serious criticisms of many social problems, particularly if those criticisms can be related to criticism of corporate activities (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). This is one way that cultural stereotypes and social conservatism are reinforced through the mass media.
The third filter: sources.

The third filter, sources, shows that the news media are dependent on government institutions and major businesses with strong interests as sources for much of their information. Because the government is the primary source of political power, a high reliance on government sources for ideas and information necessarily reinforces the status quo. Additionally, major businesses are interested in the continuation of the environment and traditions which have made them successful. These needs may not necessarily also be in the consumer’s best interest.

It makes sense that the mass media would be cozy with governments and big business. The government needs the mass media as a vehicle to disseminate its messages, and the mass media need the government for a steady, reliable source of information. The media do not have the resources to be everywhere, so the places where reporters are regularly stationed (called “beats”) are typically the places that get the most coverage. Granted, these places are often chosen because there is a lot of activity.

Official sources also save mass media time and money. Media claim to be “objective” so the use of sources that are presumed to be credible can save expenses, whereas material from unreliable sources or sources that will elicit criticism require more careful fact checking and research, which can be expensive.

To secure these favorable positions as sources of news and information, corporations and big businesses make it very easy for news media to cover them. They hire teams of public relations personnel whose sole responsibility is to secure favorable press coverage for their employer. Public relations people curry favor by doing things like giving media advance copies of speeches and reports, writing press releases in usable
language, and organizing press conferences and photo opportunities to help make the reporter’s job easier (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). As a result of easing the financial and opportunity cost of producing news, entities who hire public relations people can often become favored informants in a reporter’s pool of resources. Critical media scholars would be concerned this reliance does not allow for enough of a dissenting voice in the mass media.

The fourth filter: flak.

Herman and Chomsky (2002) call the fourth filter “flak.” Flak refers to “negative responses to a media statement or program. …If flak is produced on a large scale, or by individuals or groups with substantial resources, it can be both uncomfortable and costly to the media” (p. 26). Critical media theorists are particularly interested in the ability of governments and big business to produce flak, especially if the flak is costly or threatening, because it is related to power. Flak is an outward expression of oppositional decoding (by powerful interests), and when expressed to the mass media it can have implications for their resources.

There are two kinds of flak: direct and indirect (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Direct flak is aimed toward the media outlets themselves. On a national level, they can include calls from the President to a high-ranking network official or anchor. They may also include calls or fines from the Federal Communications Commission. A recent example of this was when the FCC fined CBS $550,000 for showing Janet Jackson’s bare breast on live network television during a Super Bowl halftime show (Kerr, 2004). Additionally, large sponsors will sometimes threaten to pull their ads from a program or
they will demand an opportunity to respond to messages they thought were blatantly offensive.

Indirect flak is when powerful interests affect their own constituencies related to a media outlet or program in a negative way. They may complain to their shareholders, encourage employees to get information elsewhere, or generally bad-mouth a particular media outlet. Also, indirect flak can occur when political groups or large organizations fund political campaigns or think-tanks that will likely develop opinions or actions that are unfavorable to certain media.

Flak is one way that even mass media are affected by the interests of the government and large advertisers to maintain the status quo. By retaliating against media in this way, powerful organizations can help insure that their interests are protected, even when the media “get out of line.”

The fifth filter: anticommunism.

Last, the fifth filter is anticommunism. According to Herman and Chomsky (2002), “Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the specter haunting property owners, as it threatens the very root of their class position and superior status” (p. 29). As a political control mechanism, this filter would interest critical media scholars for its ability to limit debate and render certain topics taboo by the mass media.

The kind of reaction Herman and Chomsky (2002) describe in reaction to a communism label is by no means limited to that word. Other equally charged labels produce the same effect in modern mass media. For example, before September 11, 2001, the word “terrorist” was not nearly as pervasive, emotionally charged or powerful as it is today. When such emotionally charged terms or labels are used by mass media, issues
can quickly become polarized. It becomes natural and normal for otherwise “objective”
media outlets to take the side of the “good guys” without considering alternative points of
view fairly. In fact, “the demand for serious evidence in support of claims…is suspended,
and charlatans can thrive as evidential sources” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 30).
Because hegemony is concerned with the maintenance of the status quo, scholars
interested in critical media studies would be interested in an effort that is made to
summarily silence any opposition to the prevailing point of view.

In conclusion, Gramsci’s idea of cultural hegemony gives us one lens through
which we can better understand how the media may help reinforce prevailing norms and
biases in our society. Herman and Chomsky’s (2002) filters provide examples of how
hegemony can be exercised in our modern American media system.

Program Planning Theory in Adult Education

Television news is produced by a staff of people who work in social groups at
jobs to develop and deliver each day’s broadcast. By considering their process as a means
of educational program planning, we can use the theoretical framework developed by
Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996, 2006) to examine how power relations and interests
impact the final broadcast. This framework is particularly suited because it provides a
means to examine planners’ socially structured capacity to act within planning and
organizational contexts. This section of the literature review begins with an examination
of the theory as it is framed by the authors in contrast to other approaches. Next, it
discusses Sork’s (1996) challenge to the model, and finally, it shows how other scholars
have used the Cervero and Wilson model before and after Sork’s critique.
In 1949, Ralph Tyler published the landmark book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. It contains the model upon which most instructional and curriculum design is based. Although Tyler was not the first person to use this model, he was the first person to formalize and publish this process. Tyler’s model takes the planner through four linear steps when planning a program: First, the user must decide what the objectives of the learning experience are. Next, s/he has to decide what educational experiences can be provided to attain these objectives. Third, the user has to organize the educational experiences to achieve those objectives, and last, s/he conducts some evaluation (Tyler, 1949). Because this model is prescriptive and heavily focused on objectives the instructor is required to figure out his/her objectives before s/he sets out to teach. Once the objectives are set, their achievement is the main focus of the process. In fact, the process is not executable without setting objectives and meeting them in a certain order. However, partly because Tyler has focused on the teaching process rather than emphasizing what content a student should be learning, his model has withstood the test of time and is still used in educational settings.

By 1971, Decker Walker realized that asking planners to address programs from Tyler’s rational, systematic approach assumed decision makers have a well-defined problem, complete information about which alternatives they might consider and knowledge of the consequences of these alternatives. This was not always his experience. So Walker (1971) developed what is today known as the naturalistic model. A key distinction of this model is that it recognizes that human beings and human decision processes, namely deliberation, play a key role in developing programs. As such, the
naturalistic model is composed of three main elements: the curriculum’s platform, its design, and the deliberation associated with it. The platform is the basis from which the planning derives. According to Walker (1971), “the platform includes an idea of what is and a vision of what ought to be, and these guide the curriculum developer in determining what he should do to realize his vision” (p. 52). The platform forms our beliefs about the world and ideas about the process that we carry with us to the planning experience. The platform also includes traditions and history and environmental influences. The second formal element of the model is deliberation. Deliberation is a key activity in the process whereby all involved parties try to identify which facts are relevant and important in the development of the program plan. In this process, solutions, including alternatives, are identified, discussed, and considered through deliberation until a decision is reached. Last in Walker’s (1971) curriculum’s design is the output of the planning process. The output is the best alternative considered, and this model says explicitly that there is no right or wrong alternative. Data is viewed as a positive component of the process, but it is not at the foreground of planning. The final decision is based upon what is possible and what is desirable.

The naturalistic approach, however, did not work for all people. The model was good for recognizing that people play a large part in the planning of programs, but it did not give much emphasis to the importance of context or the role of power. By 1989, John Forester suggested that program planners needed to consider provisions for social and economic justice. Unlike Walker, who treats all values neutrally, Forester (1989) recognized that as human beings, planners must operate from a particular value orientation, and as a result, sometimes there is a “good” or “bad” decision in a certain
situation. Forester (1989) describes an approach to program planning that focuses on how power and interests affect purposeful efforts to bring about change. He recognizes that decision making is value-laden and politically bounded. Because of this, involved parties will sometimes have conflicting wants and interests. Political and economic structures can affect the way planners respond to the needs and problems of those for whom they are planning.

The critical viewpoint to program planning defines the world politically and in need of an ethical response. Inequality frames and limits what is possible, desirable and imaginable. Forester adds that “planners must think and act politically – not to campaign for candidates, but to anticipate and reshape relations of power and powerlessness” (pp. 6-7). As a result, critical program planning asks the planner to consider the ways in which the organization reproduces existing social and political power relationships, and demands that the injustices are righted whenever possible.

The strength of critical program planning theories is their focus on an ethical position, namely that educational programs should inform social justice. The shortcoming, however, is that oftentimes these models or theories offer little more than critique. In response, Cervero and Wilson (2006) have developed a model of program planning that is suitable for both “accounting for what happens in planning practice as well as providing guides to practical action” (p. 80). Cervero and Wilson (2006) recognize program planning as a social activity in which people negotiate personal and organizational interests. Their model provides a flexible, adaptable framework that is practical for diagnosing power relationships and negotiating interests, yet it is ethically explicit in its ability to promote substantive democracy.
The central concepts of Cervero and Wilson’s model are drawn around the metaphor of a planning table. They use this metaphor “to organize attention to what matters in educational planning, namely, that people make judgments with others in social contexts about the specific features of programs” (p. 6). They recognize that planning often happens at a physical table, but more often the table is metaphorical and these kinds of decisions and negotiations are literally made around the water cooler, on the telephone, on the golf course, or many other places. Sometimes planners attend to multiple “tables” when planning negotiations are made.

As such, the first premise of the model is that planning is a social (as opposed to individual) activity. As a social construction, the planning table is necessarily infused with power relations, and planners need to recognize whose interests are at stake. Power is defined as “…the capacity to act, distributed to individual planners by virtue of the enduring social relationships in which they participate” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 119). Cervero and Wilson (1994, 2006) outline three characteristics of power that affect its nature: First, power is relational. It relates to the capacity to act within a structure. Second, power must be exercised. Where there is more than one person, there is a relationship of power. Third, power is always being negotiated. No matter which product is being planned, some people will benefit more from it and some will benefit less.

A second premise of the model relates to how those power relationships are played out. By their nature, power relations between two or more individuals are rarely symmetrical, and these asymmetrical power relations can threaten and/or foster opportunities for democratic planning. Planners have to find out how power affects the
relationships that matter in the planning process so the planner(s) can negotiate those interests appropriately when a program is being developed.

Third, embracing the aims of the critical planners, Cervero and Wilson (2006) advocate a substantively democratic planning process, and believe that every single interaction makes a difference. For this reason, the interests of everyone who is affected by the planning process need to be considered. Sometimes the affected parties cannot literally have a place at the planning table, but Cervero and Wilson (2006) argue that it is the planner’s responsibility to see that “people affected by a program are always represented in some way at the planning table as program objectives are being negotiated” (p. 155). Cervero and Wilson (2006) note that the planner must also consider whether the person representing the “absent” interests is legitimate, is the best person for the job, and is given appropriate voice for the concerns she may raise on behalf of others.

Fourth, planners must understand that planning is a political activity. What works well in one situation may not work in another, so planners must find a way to assess the needs of the various interests around the table. Cervero and Wilson (2006) outline three strategies for negotiating needs: consultations, bargaining, and disputes. In consultations, power is not very important as common interests outweigh conflicting interests and the affected parties typically agree about their needs. In bargaining, two or more people may not agree at first, but their aim is to find mutual ground through conversation. In a dispute, conflicting interests outweigh common interests and people engage others with the goal of securing a prominent position for their point of view.

Cervero and Wilson have built upon the models and ideas of the theorists and planners who preceded them. The Cervero and Wilson (2006) model is a practical
framework for program planning that can be used by planners in education and other
fields who realize that planning is done by people, and people may be served or hindered
by the relationships among those who sit at the planning table.

_Sork’s Challenge to the Model_

Not everyone believes that Cervero and Wilson have developed a model that can
explain all the complexities and nuances inherent in the planning process, however.
While Sork (1996) credits Cervero and Wilson’s work for representing “a new set of
optics for viewing the complexities of program planning” (p. 81), he also acknowledges
that he has concerns about how well negotiation works as a key analytical concept.

Specifically, Sork (1996) notes while the authors highlight the importance of
interests and power as key factors in planning, they “do not distinguish between different
kinds of negotiations and the role of interests and power in each” (p. 84). Sork draws
upon the work of Elgström and Riis (1992) that characterizes negotiation as occurring at
two levels: In substantive negotiations, planners act within the power structure to
construct a program, whereas in metanegotiations, the planners act on the power structure
itself, either maintaining or changing the macro-level power relations and interests. Sork
notes that Cervero and Wilson describe both types of negotiations in the cases they
present, but that “no attempt is made to distinguish between them or to analyze the
different strategies used in each” (p. 84). Further, Sork (1996) claims that further
exploration of the complexity of negotiations would allow for a deeper understanding of
planning and a richer range of ideas about how planners work.
Cervero and Wilson’s Model in Use

Cervero and Wilson’s theory was first described in a 1994 book, *Planning Responsibly for Adult Education: a Guide to Negotiating Power and Interests*, and revised in a new version in 2006. As a result, numerous scholars have been able to use Cervero and Wilson’s model to conduct empirical research in a variety of contexts. What these studies have reinforced -- in various planning environments -- is Cervero and Wilson’s contention that educational program development is a political process where the power relationships and interests of the people doing the planning affect program outcomes. Specifically, Mills, Cervero, Langone, and Wilson (1995) used the model to study the dynamics of planning in a state’s cooperative extension service finding that three structural factors -- organizational structure and culture, available resources, and power relationships -- constrained or enabled county agents’ planning practices. As a result of this influence, the needs addressed and the planning processes in program development were affected. Additionally, the model was used by Maclean (1997) to explain the planning of educational programs in a continuing education setting showing that power relationships are mediated to serve the interests of the various groups involved in the planning process. Third, Rees, Cervero, Moshi, and Wilson (1997) used the model to explain how planners use language to exercise power during an exchange in a program planning meeting. They showed that “responsible planners must not only be aware of many levels of meaning in discourse but must also know how to use language skillfully and politically to exercise the full extent of their agency” (p. 63).

Studies from the sourcebook containing Sork’s (1996) criticism were not written with knowledge of the commentary, but do reflect that his criticism regarding substantive
negotiations and metanegotiations is valid. For example, Hendricks (1996) found that perceiving the power and interests in a nursing education program is the first step toward changing it. Carter (1996) showed how people’s interests affect empowerment planning within a health promotion coalition. She found that during a collaborative decision-making process, political and ethical issues rose to the forefront. Kleiber (1996) did an analysis of the social dynamics of negotiating curriculum development within an independent study distance education program. She found that while the asymmetrical power relationships favored traditional educational models, the independent study practitioners were able to gain power through negotiation. Next, McDonald (1996) explored the ways that community activists work to change the meta-structure of the planning process. She found that planners who work toward a more substantially democratic planning process can affect the process itself. She concludes, “Challenges to power are inevitable” (p. 26). Finally, Scott and Schmitt-Boshnick (1996) did a case study of the collective planning of a community-based program for women showing how conflicting interests and ethical dilemmas pose challenges inside and outside the existing power structure. They found that planners use strategies such as networking, bargaining, and counteracting power as means of negotiation when they plan programs.

Since its publication, some scholars have drawn upon Sork’s (1996) work while using the Cervero and Wilson model. To name a few, Sessions and Cervero (2001) examined the negotiation with and about power relationships in the planning of HIV prevention education finding that HIV educators who choose to alter the system in which they work face considerable personal, professional, and societal obstacles. Umble, Cervero and Langone (2001) did a case study to examine a continuing education course
in public health paying particular attention to the distinction between meta-negotiation and substantive negotiation. They found that stakeholders can and do affect program outcomes by affecting power relationships during planning. Drennon and Cervero (2002) conducted a study to understand the struggles that facilitators of practitioner inquiry groups in adult literacy education face when enacting democratic practices. They found that “as facilitators negotiate within a web of power relationships to achieve their aims, they also act on power relationships in ways that either reproduce or transform them” (p. 193). Burns and Cervero (2004) used the model to identify political issues negotiated within pastoral practice finding that substantive negotiations concerned mostly the day-to-day concerns of running a ministry while meta-issues tended to focus on foundational concerns like changes in power relations or vision and resources that restrict or permit action in the ministry. Sandlin and Cervero (2003) explored how ideologies about work and education are enacted and negotiated in educational programs for welfare recipients. They found that when students raised questions in class and sought to discuss problematic issues, they were discouraged from doing so by teachers, who quickly led discussions back into “safe zones.” Finally, in a study of how adult educators negotiate power and interests in program planning for training and development in a corporate setting, Mabry and Wilson (2001) found that the capacity to negotiate interests and power varied according to specific situations and how planners perceived the involvement of various stakeholders.

The Cervero and Wilson model has been used in quantitative research as well. Yang, Cervero, Valentine, and Benson (1998) developed a research instrument that can be used to measure power and influence tactics in a program planning practice. Then,
Hendricks (2001) used Yang’s work in a multivariate study that examined the relationships between contextual factors, individual factors, and different influencing tactics in adult education program planning.

To name recent uses in dissertations, Robertson (2004) used the Cervero and Wilson model to explore the ways that multiple stakeholders’ interests are represented in the program theory building process in human resource development evaluation programs. She found that while there is some agreement among stakeholders, they also have unique understandings about how and why programs function. Further, the research showed many of the outcomes and processes identified as important by stakeholders would not be included in an outcome focused evaluation. Sandlin (2001) looked at how ideologies about work are enacted and negotiated in educational programs for welfare recipients in her dissertation using the model. She found numerous examples of how the status quo was reinforced through stereotypes, contradictions, and policies and practices. Ultimately, she raises questions concerning the ability of these programs to solve unemployment problems, and she raises issues about whose interests these programs are serving. Kim (2004) used the model in a dissertation examining the managerial development program of a Korean insurance company to reveal that the asymmetrical relationship of power among the stakeholders in the company was facilitated by the organization’s hierarchy, and he found that although other stakeholders recognized the expertise of the human resource development professionals he studied, the practitioners perceived themselves as being marginalized. The findings also showed that unequal power relations were sustained in the program evaluation mostly by stakeholders’ self-regulation of their conduct in terms of norms, standards, and expectations about their
roles. Finally, this study found in spite of immense criticism, the use of end-of-course participant surveys in HRD practice could be traced to their meaning as a political bargaining tool. Fourth, Penland (2004) examined the impact of intercultural factors on the planning of theological education in the Dominican Republic. He found that certain factors limited collaborative planning to the resolution of substantive issues and left key metaissues unresolved. He also found that in some cases, subordinate stakeholders did not have access to the planning table regardless of who was leading the discussions, and this was one way that educational planning reproduced Dominican societal inequalities. In all these examples, drawn from diverse contexts where planning occurs, power relationships and interests play an integral role in program outcomes.

In conclusion, program planning has been a part of adult education as long as adult education programs have existed. Beginning with Tyler’s (1949) linear model of deciding objectives, planning experiences, organizing those experiences, and evaluating outcomes, various other theorists (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Forester, 1989; Sork, 1996; Walker, 1971) have made changes and improvements to better incorporate the humanistic and non-linear aspects inherent in planning programs. Particularly, the Cervero and Wilson model gives us a good framework for considering minority interests and incorporating an ethical component into program planning.

The last section of this literature review provides a useful model for a closer examination of the power relations and interests that influence the production of local television news. While there are relatively few studies about media production in general, there are none that use the Cervero and Wilson model (2006), and particularly none that use the Cervero and Wilson model to examine the negotiation of power relationships and
interests in local television news. This theoretical framework provides a critical lens
though which hegemonic perspectives and practices can be uncovered and examined in
the production of a specific media text. With the increasingly pervasive and changing
nature of mass media, a more complete understanding of the power relations and interests
in news production will help adult educators become better equipped to meet and serve
the needs of their student populations who rely on the television to learn about the world
in which they live.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast?
2. How do interests shape the decision-making process?
3. How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. In the following sections, I discuss the design of the study, case and sample selection and description, data collection methods, data analysis methods, my pilot study, validity and reliability, researcher’s assumptions, and limitations.

Design of the Study

The design of this study is a qualitative case study. Miles and Huberman (1994) call a case study “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). Because this study closely examines a single news cycle at one local television station, a bounded context, this design is appropriate. Additionally, Merriam (1998) notes that case studies are particularly useful when researchers are interested in “insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-9). Because this effort aims to understand a decision-making process, one can further conclude that the design is appropriate.
In general, qualitative research aims to reveal how the various parts work together to form a whole. Qualitative data is “rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions…are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). Shank (2002) calls qualitative research a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. Though he says this kind of research is planned and ordered, it depends on the world of experience, and helps scientists coordinate and orchestrate a growing sense of richness of meaning.

The unique assumptions and characteristics of qualitative research are explained by numerous researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Creswell (1998) calls these assumptions “a basic set of beliefs that guide…inquiries” related to the nature of reality, the relationship of the researcher to the participant being studied, the role of values in the study, and the process of research (p. 74).

First, Creswell (1998) addresses assumptions about the nature of reality. Qualitative research is based on a premise that reality is constructed, which means that multiple, participative realities exist: those of the researcher, the participant, the reader of the study. There is not a single “right” explanation for why something may have happened. Rather, there could be numerous alternative explanations for a single observation.

As I explored how media content is produced with an eye toward uncovering the major decisions that shaped the broadcast, I had to interpret the events, actions, and conversations that I observed throughout the day. As a result, I had to entertain multiple
realities and try to understand how the participants constructed the broadcast to represent their version of the truth.

Second, Creswell (1998) addresses assumptions about the relationship of the researcher to those being researched. Unlike some other kinds of scientists, qualitative researchers try to minimize the separateness between themselves and the participant to better understand the way the participants see the world. One way they do this, according to Merriam (1998), is to use the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Rather than using an inventory, questionnaire, computer or other inanimate means to mediate data, in qualitative research, a human data collection instrument can respond to various contexts, s/he can adapt techniques to the circumstances, the overall environment can be considered, nonverbal cues can be incorporated in the data, the researcher can immediately begin to make sense of what s/he is observing, and where appropriate, the researcher can explore aspects of the data gathering process that may not immediately make sense to him/her.

For this reason, I gathered data in an actual television newsroom, alongside reporters and others, to observe how information for the broadcast is gathered, processed, and produced. I was able to talk to the participants and ask questions as the need arose to get clarification or acquire information that helped me address my research questions.

As one might imagine, this kind of close working relationship has an effect on the role of values in a study. This is the third assumption Creswell (1998) addresses. Qualitative inquiry is always value-laden, and the values affect the framing, focusing, and conduct of research. The qualitative researcher must accept this as the nature of the research and accept his/her values and biases as well. As a human endeavor, qualitative
research is infused with value judgments at every stage from the research design, to the
data gathering and analysis, to the conclusions. To help address this situation, I disclose
my assumptions later in this chapter so that readers can judge for themselves how any
inherent biases or assumptions might have colored my interpretation of the results.

Next, qualitative research is primarily inductive and builds abstractions, concepts,
hypotheses, or theories as opposed to deductively testing a theory that already exists.
Qualitative data analysis yields common themes, categories, typologies, and concepts
derived from the data collected in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). A
qualitative researcher begins with general questions which are refined as the study
proceeds. As an inductive process, qualitative research aims to develop an understanding
of individual cases (Creswell, 1998). Unlike quantitative research, which typically seeks
to understand universal laws or predict generalizations, qualitative research is
“generalizable” only to the case being studied. The results may suggest a way to
understand other similar situations, but the same conclusions cannot reasonably be made
about other cases. For this reason also, a qualitative design suits my study. Through my
data collection, I was able to draw conclusions about the production of media content. I
hope that these conclusions might be able to help researchers better understand this
broadcast.

Last, qualitative data is richly descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam,
1998). The research focuses on process, meaning and understanding. These are concepts
best understood by words and pictures rather than numbers. The findings are often
supported by data like direct quotations from people, citations from documents, excerpts
from videotapes, descriptions of the environment observed, and information about the
people involved as well as the activities taking place. I believe that an understanding of a
creative process like media production can best be portrayed by observations of the actual
parties involved in that production, as well as interviews so they can speak about their
work in their own voices. My research results are full of thick, rich descriptions and
direct quotations to support the findings and interpretations of my research.

Case and Sample Selection and Description

For this study, two levels of sampling were necessary. First, I had to select the
case that I would study, and then I had to select the particular people I would interview
within that case. To select my case, I employed purposive or purposeful sampling, which
is sampling “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand,
and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned”
(Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Below, I provide further explanation about why I chose this case
over others, and I also provide some description about this case. Then, I provide some
information about the sample selection.

Case Selection

The following section provides details about the three criteria I used to select my
site. It also contains information about the duration of my study and the selected day that
I conducted the research. First, to select my site, I used three criteria: First, I wanted a site
that produced a commercial, on-air, daily news broadcast. Second, I wanted a station that
had a broad reach. Third, I wanted a station whose primary broadcast included network
and local news. Next, the duration and day of my study were selected to coincide with
Nielsen Media Research’s television ratings tracking, also called “sweeps,” and the
staff’s weekly brainstorming meeting.
Site selection.

First, I wanted a site that produced a commercial on-air daily news broadcast. Commercial broadcasting, which is broadcasting supported by commercial advertising as its primary means of financial support, is by far the dominant type of broadcasting in the United States. Furthermore, in the genre of local television news broadcasts in America, it is extremely rare to find non-commercial broadcasts. The only non-commercial local television broadcasts I was able to find are aired on public-access TV or cable channels with a very small viewing area. They were produced by students or amateurs and funded by some other primary source besides advertising. For example, the site used for my pilot study aired its broadcast over local cable stations to three counties and was supported financially by a major university. Further, it did not track its Nielsen (television) ratings and did not sell advertising. Programs that air on local access or public broadcasting channels are primarily supported by the government as a public service, sometimes with additional support from non-profit organizations who receive a tax benefit. In place of commercials, non-commercial programs sometimes run public service announcements or do not have any broadcast interruptions at all.

My chosen research site has considerable reach. It reaches 392,000 households and 1,021,138 viewers over a 23-county viewing area in three states. While technically this audience spans two different television markets, the Nielsen ratings my site receives are from the top-40 market in which it physically resides.

Third, the station broadcasts local news as well as network programming. The station is a local major network affiliate that is owned by an independent, publicly owned communications company that has interests in newspapers, television stations, and
interactive media. While the majority of their news broadcast is locally-focused and produced, as a network affiliate, they do use network news in their local news broadcast.

**Duration and day of study.**

The duration of my observation was one news cycle, which is one day of news programming. Although almost any day could have been used for this study, a Monday in November was selected because Monday was the day the station’s news team holds its weekly brainstorming and planning meeting. Additionally, from November 2 to November 29, 2005, all 210 television markets in the United States were monitored by Nielsen Media Research, the company that produces television ratings. This is the only time of year when all markets were monitored. The demographic viewing data collected during this period, which is often referred to as “sweeps,” is used by local television stations, cable systems, advertisers, and their agencies to buy and sell commercial advertising, set prices, and make programming decisions. During sweeps, television programming is often particularly captivating in an attempt by stations to lure audiences from other stations which will allow the higher-rated stations to sell air time at higher rates because of broader audience reach.

**Case Description**

This section covers a description of my site pre-visit, the schedule of newscasts this site airs, and what types of stories are included in the broadcast.

**Site visit.**

On Monday, October 3, 2005, I spent a news cycle at the station to become familiar with the staff including their positions and roles and responsibilities; to allow the staff to become familiar with me and the aims of the project; to ascertain whether the
station’s daily operations are typical of a television news broadcast; and to get a feel for the general course and pace of business throughout the day. I also wanted the opportunity to compare the site to the one I used for my pilot study. Though I was not formally collecting data, I spent the period from 8 a.m. until approximately 7 p.m. following the same routine I did on the day of my observation.

Generally, I found that the station ran very similarly to the station where I conducted my pilot study, and the staff – though fewer in number – had identical roles and responsibilities. I was able to determine ways that I could have addressed each of my research and interview questions based on what I observed. The visit showed me the course of operations and the pace of the office. Further, having done this pre-visit, I knew which kinds of incidents were relevant to my work, and I was able to better focus when I did my data collection.

**Broadcast schedule.**

This station airs news broadcasts Monday through Friday at 6 a.m., 6 p.m., 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. The 6 a.m. broadcast is two half-hour shows running consecutively for one hour. Planning begins with the associate producer and anchor/producer reviewing local media sources for stories starting between 2 and 3 a.m. Most of the stories in this broadcast are produced in the newsroom from pre-recorded footage or they are simply read by the anchor without accompanying video. Most or all of the morning stories are attributed to other media outlets because the sources are typically not available for interviews to confirm the facts before the show goes on the air. For example, the 6 a.m. anchor would say, “The *New York Times* reports today that the sky is falling….” when reporting a story.
The station also produces an evening news program, and the half-hour 6 p.m. broadcast is the day’s main broadcast. When stories are used in the evenings that were also part of the morning broadcast, a named source is contacted and interviewed so that the latest information can be updated and the attribution to another media outlet can be removed. The 6 p.m. broadcast is replayed from tape at 7 p.m. The half-hour 11 p.m. content is mostly from the 6 p.m. broadcast with a few changes if anything has happened on the previously reported stories in the evening hours or if any new stories have broken. Sometimes the 11 p.m. broadcast is exactly the same as the 6 p.m. show.

*Types of stories.*

There are four basic kinds of stories used in television news, and this station is typical in its use of these stories. Table 1 outlines the types of stories used at this station in order from least to most complex. The complexity usually, but not always, directly corresponds to the subject’s newsworthiness which also corresponds to the story’s length.

These types of stories range in complexity from having an anchor read 10 seconds of text off the teleprompter with no video accompaniment (a “reader”) to 2-and-a-half minute “package” stories, complete with an anchor’s introduction to a reporter’s edited video footage and audio tracks gathered during reporting out in the community. A package story typically contains one to three interviews as well as footage, called b-roll, of the environment where the story takes place. It sometimes contains stock footage taken from station archives or network feeds also. Additionally, package stories are usually “teased” throughout the broadcast until they are aired, which means they are given additional attention and airtime in hopes that the viewer can be enticed to stay tuned to find out more. Package stories are usually the day’s most newsworthy and well-
### Table 1

*Types of Broadcast News Stories and Other Terms to Know*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain copy or “reader”</td>
<td>Anchor reads copy directly from a teleprompter. S/he may or may not have a graphic over his/her shoulder.</td>
<td>:10-:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice-over (VO)</td>
<td>Anchor reads copy of entire story from teleprompter. Story includes some shots from B-roll.</td>
<td>:10-:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice over-Sound on Tape (VOSOT or SOT) (pron. Vŏ-sahrht)</td>
<td>Anchor reads copy of entire story from teleprompter. Story includes some shots from B-roll and a soundbite. Usually the anchor &quot;tags&quot; the story with a little more information after the soundbite.</td>
<td>:10-:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Package</td>
<td>Anchor introduces story. Reporter talks throughout story. Story includes b-roll and soundbites (1 or more). Story usually also includes a “stand up.” It often is “teased” before a commercial break. Usually the anchor &quot;tags&quot; the story with a little more information at the end.</td>
<td>1:30-2:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other terms to know

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-Roll</td>
<td>The video that covers the anchor/reporter's voice track.</td>
<td>Always shoot more than you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soundbite</td>
<td>A short audio &amp; video segment of an interview</td>
<td>:02-:10 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standup</td>
<td>Part of a package story where a reporter is filmed usually standing somewhere that has meaning in relation to the story. Can be used in story as a transition or summation.</td>
<td>:05-:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
developed stories. The package stories typically also contain a “stand-up” which is a shot of the reporter standing somewhere on the site of the news and talking into the camera. Stand-ups are usually used as transitions in the package.

Sample Selection

Like the case selection, the sample with which I conducted interviews was also chosen purposefully. With a staff of five, I was able to interview everyone on the news team. All five individuals work on the main broadcast of the day at 6 p.m. while two (Anita and Holly) also work on the 6 a.m. broadcast. Table 2 details information about the staff at this station including their titles, responsibilities, assignment on the day of my observation, and daily schedule.

Data Collection Methods

The data for qualitative case studies often comes from interviews, observations and document analysis. According to Merriam (1998) “understanding the case in its totality, as well as the intensive, holistic description and analysis characteristic of a case study, mandates both breadth and depth of data collection” (p. 134). For this reason, I used all three of these data collection methods in this study.

Observations

Observations are “fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The kind of data that observations access include descriptions of physical environments; descriptions of the participants; observed activities and interactions;
Table 2

*News Staffing Structure at the TV Station*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>News Director Assignment Editor Producer</td>
<td>Select stories, “stack” (order) stories, assign stories, find stories. Produce network packages.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m. - 7 p.m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Occasional reporting on copy stories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Anchor Assoc. Producer Fill-in Producer</td>
<td>Produce network packages, write studio-based stories, evening anchor, answer phones, advise when needed.</td>
<td>10 a.m. - 7 p.m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Assignments: GM Closing Plant; Iraq; Healthwatch.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Anchor Reporter</td>
<td>Report on one package story per PM show, evening anchor, tape b-roll when needed, voiceovers when needed, find stories.</td>
<td>10 a.m. - 7 p.m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Assignments: Turkey Dinners; Murder Story</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Anchor (AM) Producer (AM) Reporter</td>
<td>Report on one package story per PM show, morning anchor, tape b-roll when needed, voiceovers when needed, find stories. For AM broadcast: select stories, “stack” (order) stories, revise stories when needed.</td>
<td>2 a.m. - ~1 p.m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Assignment: Georgia Journey (airing Wed.)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Assoc. Producer (AM) Fill-in Anchor (AM) Reporter</td>
<td>Report on one package story per PM show, tape b-roll when needed, voiceovers when needed, find stories. For AM broadcast: revise stories when needed, edit/produce stories when needed.</td>
<td>3 a.m. - ~1 p.m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Assignment: Operation Christmas Child</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
conversations; subtle factors like unplanned activities, innuendos, nuances, and rituals, what does not happen; and a researcher’s own behavior (Merriam, 1998).

The relationship between the researcher and his/her participants in the field can span a wide range. The researcher may adopt one or more stances during the course of an observational period – which may last from minutes to months. Gold’s (1958) typology offers a continuum of four possible stances ranging from being a complete participant -- where the researcher is an active member of the group being studied, but the other group members do not know they are being studied -- to being a complete observer -- where the researcher is hidden from the scene, literally or figuratively.

In this study, I conducted a day-long observation of the planning of the broadcast as well as an observation of the day’s broadcast. The stance I took most closely resembles that of the observer-participant, which means I was a known observer to the group, and my role as a participant is subordinate to the role as an observer. With this kind of observation, the researcher can access a wide range of people and information, but the level of information revealed is dependent upon the amount of access members will allow.

Interviews

Interviews are “open-ended questions and probes [that] yield in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Interviews are a primary data collection source for qualitative research.

For this research, I used the interview guide approach, where “topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form; [the] interviewer decides sequence
and wording of questions in the course of the interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 349). Though general questions were developed in advance, I modified these questions to inquire about specific events after my day of observation so that my questions referred to things that happened during the day. The interview guide is included as Appendix A. According to Patton (2002), this type of approach to data collection accesses data that will elucidate and illuminate a particular participant. The researcher can spontaneously build a conversation about a particular participant, can word questions spontaneously and use the participant’s own words, but the focus is on a predetermined topic. Participants were encouraged to digress from the interview guide to keep the interview more conversational while still related to the situation at hand. Additionally, the use of an interview guide helped insure that important topics were not missed or that the sequencing of questions did not result in different perspectives than another sequence might have elicited.

In this study, I obtained consent to interview the key participants and led them in guided interviews that were 30 to 90 minutes in length. I tape recorded each interview and transcribed them as quickly after the interview as possible. Questions were directed to specific decisions related to the stories and processes that took place during the observation. Because the news team produces new broadcasts every news cycle, I wanted to make sure as little time elapsed as possible between the observation and the interview so they did not get incidents confused or they did not forget why they made certain decisions. For this reason, the interviews took place no more than two days after the observation.

I also included some questions in an informal conversational interview format during my observation. In this kind of interview, “questions emerge from the immediate
context and are asked in the natural course of things; there is no predetermination of question topics or wording” (Patton, 2002, p. 349). This type of interview accesses data that is related to the immediate context. The questions flow from emerging situations in the field, including what is happening, who is present or what needs further clarification. Data is different for each person interviewed, and the questions change over time. Questions can be tailored to the person or situation at hand, and they can make use of the immediate surroundings and context to make things more real or understandable (Patton, 2002). They lasted only as long as it took to get the information needed, and they happened spontaneously.

**Documents**

Documents traditionally are secondary sources of data in qualitative studies, but increasingly, they are becoming more important (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Documents typically consist of “written materials from organizational, clinical, or programs records; memoranda and correspondence; office publications and reports; personal diaries, letters and artistic works, photographs and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The data captured from documents are typically an excerpt contained in a way that records and preserves context. Documents may also provide information that cannot be gathered by other means.

One of the documents I used in this study was a videotape of the day’s news broadcast. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) distinguish popular culture documents like this as documents “produced for commercial purposes to entertain, persuade, and enlighten the public” (p. 58). They may include commercials, TV programs, photographs, news reports, or audio or video recordings. They note these documents are often of particular
interest to “researchers interested in media studies, …cultural studies, critical theory, and various forms of postmodernism” (p. 58).

Additionally, I got a copy of the day’s final rundown which lists the order of stories, length, spacing of commercial breaks, the kind of video treatment, the kind of audio treatment, graphics used, the writer, and where it can be found in the script in relationship to other stories. The rundown is included as Appendix B. I also secured a copy of the script. The script details all text that runs across the teleprompter during the broadcast. This will mean it has verbatim copy of everything the anchors say including the reader stories, VOs, and the VOSOTs (except for the pre-recorded soundbites). It also tells the camera used, the speaker, and the amount of time allowed for the text. Last, I was able to get printed material about the station including coverage area and market penetration, instructions to reporters about how to create identification graphics (called “supers”), and e-mail messages from the news director to the reporters with comments about their stories and the day’s reporting.

Data Analysis Methods

In qualitative research, data analysis begins at the same time as data collection and intensifies as the data collection progresses (Merriam, 1998). Throughout this process a researcher makes sense out of the data s/he has collected by organizing and finding meaning in the interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and other materials that a researcher gathers throughout the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative data analysis involves “working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan &
Biklen, 1998, p. 157). In my study, the primary means of data analysis was the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

According to Merriam (1998), the major task of the constant comparative method is “to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data” (p. 180). First, a researcher immerses him or herself in the data looking for meaningful incidents related to the research question. Then, the researcher compares these findings to other findings to establish similarities and differences. Through this constant comparison, commonalities are labeled and distinguished as categories (Merriam, 1998). Throughout the data collection process, other incidents are continuously compared and coded to fit into the existing categories or into new categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process continues throughout the analysis until all data has been assigned a category. After the initial categories are identified, the categories are compared to each other to determine the relationships between the categories. By establishing the relationships between the categories, a researcher can develop a thorough picture of the phenomenon being investigated. The constant comparative method is an inductive process whereby the categories are constantly refined and integrated until the final categories are named (Merriam, 1998).

This is the way I analyzed the data for this study. First, I prepared and organized my data. This included transcribing my interviews, typing up my field notes, and sorting my documentary data depending upon what I had (Creswell, 1998). Once I had the field notes and interviews transcribed, I read through the documents carefully and assigned codes to meaningful bits or chunks of data. In deciding what bits to code, I always kept in
mind my research questions. The codes were determined based upon the content of the data. If there was not an existing code for the content, a new code was developed.

After I had completed the initial coding process, I went back to the codes I had created and grouped similar answers to form categories. During this phase, I used an Excel spreadsheet to help sort items in each category. I copied each coded datum into the spreadsheet, using one line per datum. Each datum began with a code according to the research question it addressed with a second “content” code following the question indicator. First, I sorted the data by question and then by “content” code using the Sort function in Excel. Sorting the data using these levels made it easier for me to see where categories were forming and whether I had any categories that should be consolidated or split. I rechecked each datum in each category to make sure it had been assigned in a way that made sense. When needed, I reassigned it to a more appropriate category. The codes eventually formed the categories that eventually became the major themes in each research question.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on March 3, 2005, at a student-run station on the campus of a major research university in the South. I selected this site based upon its close proximity, the professor/executive producer’s willingness to let me observe their operation, and the operation’s similarity to a local commercial TV news broadcast. The observation began at approximately 9 a.m. with the morning planning meeting and ran until approximately 8:30 p.m. after the day’s post-mortem meeting or after-action review. I kept detailed field notes during my observation session and added reflection to them
when I wrote them up. I also conducted informal conversational interviews throughout the observation period and noted the information gathered in my field notes.

Most of my observation period was spent in the station’s newsroom. When I was not in the newsroom during the day -- from approximately 10 a.m. to approximately 2 p.m. -- I followed a reporter and photographer as they developed and taped their story while they rode around the city. During this period, I was able to observe and ask numerous questions about how and why certain things were done in or for the story.

During the live broadcast from 5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., I split my time between the studio and the control room. From 6 p.m. to approximately 8:30 p.m. I attended the post-mortem meetings, and I spoke with the executive producer about the day’s events. I also thanked him for the opportunity to study his group.

While I was there, I obtained consent to conduct formal interviews with the producer and the reporter that I shadowed. The interviews took place in-person on the day following my observation. I interviewed the participants at mutually-agreed upon times in mutually-agreed upon locations. Both interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes in length and supported by an interview guide which was developed the previous day after the observation. The participants were encouraged to digress from the guide. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed within a week of their occurrence.

Additionally, several documents were collected from the newsroom site including a tape of the day’s broadcast, a script, a rundown of the broadcast, and the director’s and producer’s notes which provided their perspectives of an analysis of the day’s broadcast as well as a synopsis of the post-mortem meeting.
The pilot study provided a useful glimpse into the kinds of decisions that go into making a broadcast like this as well as some insight into the reasons for these decisions. For example, numerous decisions about which stories were covered or not covered were affected by what the executive producer believed was important or not important. The executive producer also had good and bad relationships with various sources around the city and these relationships affected which sources were pursued by the student reporters. Even the focus of the reporter’s story that I observed changed numerous times based on her own beliefs and training about what is and is not newsworthy and how that information should be presented. She also had some opinions about how to attract and keep an audience, and she was able to articulate numerous techniques by which this is done and why it is important.

By doing this pilot study, I was able to develop processes and set my expectations about what it was like to conduct a study with this kind of design. As a result of the pilot study, I was better able to focus on relevant activities throughout the day of my dissertation study because I had a better understanding of television newsroom operations. And, among numerous other things, I had a better idea how to direct questions during my interviews so that I could get the information that I was seeking.

Validity and Reliability

In this section, I will discuss the internal validity, the external validity, and the reliability of the data gathered for this study.

*Internal Validity*

In qualitative research, internal validity, sometimes called credibility, “deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Merriam
(1998) further asserts that qualitative research is inherently valid because, as the instrument of data collection, researchers have direct contact with the environment being studied. They are an eyewitness to the events as they happen. Because of this relationship, the researcher is able to offer her interpretation (etic) of someone else’s (emic) perspective or reality.

In order to help insure internal validity, I used numerous strategies. First, I employed triangulation or “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). I formally interviewed participants and held numerous casual conversations with them to get information from multiple moments in time. Additionally, I observed them for a complete news cycle and collected documentary information to support the things I saw and heard. I also explicitly stated my experience, assumptions and biases as a researcher in my dissertation so that readers can better understand the manner in which the data was interpreted. Last, I employed a member check where I asked the news director to provide feedback about my finding for question 1 so I could find out whether she thought my interpretation captured her experience. I provided her with the descriptive response I wrote in response to this question. She said she was glad to read the finding and found it “interesting” and “really accurate, even though some of it does hurt.” She suggested two minor factual corrections, which I made. She asked if she could change a quote, which I declined after I explained that her quotes gave meaning to the study when they could be understood in their original context. She agreed to forego this change.
External Validity

External validity, sometimes called generalizability, is “concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). This usually leads to a problem in qualitative research whose goal is “to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is true of many” (Merriam, 1998, p. 57). In order to help counter this situation, Merriam suggests that researchers provide rich, thick description and fully describe the individuals or programs being researched. These descriptors will help readers compare their situation to the research context. In order to enhance the external validity of this study, I followed these suggestions. It should be noted that this study is an examination of one day of news gathering at one station during the November 2005 “sweeps” period.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability, sometimes called dependability, is “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Because qualitative research often focuses on individual situations, reliability in a traditional sense is not a valuable measure for a qualitative researcher. Rather, Merriam (1998) suggests qualitative scientists ask “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206). To do this, she suggests that researchers clearly articulate their own positions, use triangulation and keep an audit trail. To help insure reliability, I included my assumptions below. Additionally, the assumptions and theory behind the study are stated explicitly. I also use triangulation as described above, and I kept detailed field notes outlining my steps throughout the study.
Researcher’s Assumptions

The nature of qualitative research is based on the assumption that reality is constructed. As such, it is based on one’s own experiences. It is individual and multiple in meanings and ever-changing all at the same time. It is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to uncover the participants’ interpretation about the reality of their world. For this reason, it is necessary for qualitative researchers to acknowledge their biases in collecting and interpreting the data.

I have had the opportunity to work for more than a decade as a public relations professional. I have worked for some of America’s industry-leading corporations including General Motors, American Honda Motor Company, Symantec Corporation, and Kelly Services among others. I have also worked for top-ranked public relations firms like Manning, Selvage and Lee; and Fleishman-Hillard where I had the opportunity to serve large and small clients in the corporate and technology sectors. I have also worked in a major market radio station owned and operated by ABC/Capital Cities and a flagship university.

In these mass communications jobs, I have had varying amounts of control over the final product that was seen by the public. In some cases, I was trying to convince reporters and editors that what I had to say was worthy of space in their outlet. Other times, I was the one others were trying to convince. For example, when I develop collateral material or edit a website, my words are the words that appear to readers. Other times, like when I launch a new product or business line and develop a press release, a lot of my “success” depends on how the story is received by the press. Over the years, I have learned how to determine newsworthiness, and I have learned to manipulate
newsworthiness. In other words, I have learned to “play the game.” I have leaked stories. I have held stories. And I have spun stories to present the most favorable position for my employer, building and protecting corporate brands and reputations all the way. I have seen the “back side” of many newsworthy events and experiences, and I know that the media often cannot or do not give a complete or accurate picture of what is happening regarding a given participant or event. Professionally, I have sometimes been helped by the way a story is told, and sometimes I have not.

Because of my work, I realize that the version of things I see on the news is not the only version. Not everyone is so fortunate. I had a grandmother who lived six blocks outside the Detroit city limits for nearly 50 years. She believed that what she saw on TV was “truth.” As a result, she would drive seven miles into the suburbs rather than go two miles into Detroit to visit her favorite restaurant chain. Rather than seeing the arts, culture, history, and beauty of the city, she saw murder, rape, kidnappings, and theft committed by people unlike her, in a city unlike the one where she lived.

I know America is full of people like my grandmother who believe what they see on the television news. Many of them do not realize there is a whole industry full of people like me, dedicated to influencing what they see and hear in the news. I think these folks’ lack of information about the workings of the media allows them to be easily persuaded by people and organizations that do not have their best interests in mind. I do not think they can adequately serve their own needs from their position of ignorance. I hope that my work on this project can help these people consider alternatives to the world in which they think they now live.
Limitations

Numerous issues related to qualitative research in general, and this study in particular, affect this study. First, as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis I bring certain biases to the work. This can be problematic because human beings have shortcomings. I have taken efforts to assure the validity of this study by using field notes and meetings with my committee members.

Second, although I assured participants that they would receive confidential treatment, they may have been self-conscious, which may have caused them to withhold or modify their actions or information, effectively manipulating the data I collected.

Third, I did not have unlimited access to the station, so this affected how I did my data collection. I originally requested two days at the site based on my pilot study design which was shown to be successful. However, during my planning, it was determined that I could benefit from an additional day of observation, and from spreading my interview questions over at least two days following my observation. Although the news director agreed to these changes, she reminded me how small her staff was, that she was short-staffed, and that she could not allow me any more time than this to conduct the research.

Fourth, this research was conducted during “sweeps” because television during this period is typically more captivating, and it often includes the best examples of programming that a station can offer. However, because the research was done during this ratings-gathering period, the programming may have been slightly different than programming that is offered during a non-sweeps period.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the nature of qualitative research and why I chose a case study design for my work. Additionally, I provided the reader with considerable detail about the operations of a television station, particularly as they relate to the production of a local television newscast. Particularly, I gave information about the staff including their positions, roles and responsibilities; explained the station’s daily operations including how and why certain things are done; and gave the reader a feel for the general course and pace of business throughout the day at the television station I have selected for my study. I described the types of data collection I used, and talked about the constant comparative method of data analysis. I spent several pages discussing the pilot study I conducted which successfully employed the design I used for this research. Last, I talked about the validity and reliability of this study, my assumptions, and the limitations of this work.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast?
2. How do interests shape the decision-making process?
3. How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?

The Decision-Making Process

The news cycle is part of a continuous process that repeats day after day like a spiral, with the change being the new events and new content that are drawn from things that happen throughout the new day. This section presents the answer to the first research question, “What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast?”

Inductive analysis revealed the following five steps in the process of news production at this station: selection of the stories, organizing of the stories, reporting of the stories, writing and editing of the stories, and the broadcast itself.

This station broadcasts two and a half hours of news Monday through Friday. The half-hour news broadcasts begin at 6 p.m., 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. The 6 p.m. broadcast is the main news broadcast, which is produced throughout the workday. There is also a 7 p.m. broadcast which is a taped replay of the 6 p.m. broadcast. The 11 p.m. broadcast is usually a replay of the 6 p.m. broadcast with updated weather and sports, but sometimes
breaking news stories are added if appropriate. Additionally, there is a 6 a.m. news show. It is one hour in length, programmed as two consecutive half-hour shows. It has approximately the same amount of hard news as the evening broadcast, but because it is an hour in length, it also has a lot of other news, like business and entertainment news. Much of the news in the morning broadcast has been reported in other outlets previously and is re-reported with attribution. The attribution is used because in most cases the stories reported by other outlets cannot be verified before the show airs at 6 a.m. since most offices and businesses are closed and most individuals are asleep.

Selecting the Stories

The selection of the stories for the broadcast is done by the producer. At this station, Anita is the producer for the 6 a.m. broadcast, and Tessa is the producer for the 6 p.m. broadcast. Tessa also works as the news director, and she decides if stories will be changed in the 11 p.m. broadcast. For the morning and evening news, the process of selecting the stories is similar.

Each day, the producer looks for story ideas in several places including:

- Daily bulletins from organizations including the Poynter Institute, a non-profit organization that “promotes excellence in journalism” (Poynter Institute, 2005). The Poynter daily feed tells subscribers about news trends and national and international story angles. There are also similar feeds offered by news organizations like CNN and the New York Times to which the producer subscribes.

- Stories from major wire services including feeds for the states where the station’s broadcast is seen. When a wire story is selected for use, it is copied verbatim from
the wire feed and pasted into the day’s script. This text is then modified as
additional reporting is done throughout the day, but rarely do the story’s angle or
sources change.

- Rundown from the previous day’s network broadcast. As a network affiliate, the
  producer has access to the listing of all the stories that ran on the previous day’s
  national network news as well as the length and treatment of those stories.
- Local newspapers, radio stations, and other TV stations. These story sources are
  checked regularly throughout the day so the news team, and the producer in
  particular, can know not only what is news, but also what is being covered by
  other media in their area and how.
- The daily file. The station maintains a filing cabinet with information sorted by
  date so that when a press release or news tip arrives, it can be referenced on the
  day of a particular anniversary or special event. Every morning the day’s file is
  checked for news stories.
- Press releases. The producer receives press releases by mail, fax, and e-mail from
  local companies and institutions. She reviews them and decides if and how they
  can be used in the broadcast. On the day of my visit, she threw away a stack of
  faxed press releases that probably contained about 50 sheets of paper. She held
  approximately 10 pages for further review.
- Phone calls. The news room receives calls throughout the day from public
  relations professionals and concerned citizens who have seen something in their
  community and want publicity for some event or newsworthy happening or who
  have questions about things in their community.
• **Organic reporting.** Reporters are always alert when they are out working on the day’s stories (and even when they are not) and will often hear about new trends, significant community events, or disasters. They can and do suggest these stories to the producer for consideration.

• **Planning meeting.** This station holds a weekly meeting on Monday afternoon to brainstorm ideas and help space out assignments so that reporters can allocate their time and energy appropriately.

The producer also reviews the rundown from the previous broadcast to see if there are any stories that can be reused or updated in the broadcast she is planning. Sometimes new information is available about these stories and the producer will assign the story to a reporter to be updated. If the story is scheduled as a copy story, the producer will often make phone calls herself in the course of the day, working as a reporter, to verify or update information. Verifying the information reported by another outlet allows the station to remove the attribution and claim the reporting as their own.

Although most of the stories are selected in the beginning of the shift, the rundown is constantly being modified throughout the shift. Often new stories must be added or previously selected stories must be removed depending on the demands of the rest of the broadcast or whether there is any breaking news. If the more important stories included in the rundown are longer than the amount of time scheduled or if a breaking story is added, the rundown is modified by eliminating less newsworthy stories. The broadcast cannot run longer than a half hour in the evening or an hour in the morning including the commercial breaks.
Organizing the Stories

The rundown provides a way to the producer to schedule and organize the stories for a particular broadcast. At this station, the producers use a computerized program that looks like a spreadsheet. The program breaks the half-hour shows into segments or “blocks” separated by commercial breaks. The blocks are designated A, B, C, D, and E, with A at the beginning of the broadcast. Each block ends with a ten-second mention of some of the stories coming up after the commercial break. This mention is called a “tease.” Anita said, “You end each block with a tease, you know, to hook people and bring them back so they want to stay around and watch what’s coming up next.” The commercial breaks usually run between one and two minutes in length.

The spreadsheet has columns that make reference and planning easier (see Appendix B). It tracks information including which page number of the final script the story can be found on, the name (or “slug”) of the story, which anchor the camera should focus on during the story when the show airs, the name of the writer, notes, the length of the story in seconds, and the total running time of the show. The computerized spreadsheet also allows the producer to link to the story in the script. This handy feature helps make organizing the broadcast easier because when the producer reorders the stories by cutting and pasting the slug to a new line, the computer then reorders the script and will fill in all the corresponding information across the spreadsheet. Last, the rundown also shows the producer how much time, in seconds, that she is over or under the scheduled broadcast time.

The segments in each broadcast typically contain certain types of news. In the 6 p.m. newscast, the A block contains the local news stories, with the most important
stories -- called “hard” news -- earlier in the broadcast. Because this station’s emphasis is local news, local news is deemed more important than national news in most cases. The day I was there, however, the lead story in the 6 p.m. broadcast was a national news story that was deemed to have significant local impact. This story was selected as the lead story because there was no non-national local story that day that was determined to be more significant to viewers.

The day I was there, the A block also contained package stories about a local family who cooked Thanksgiving dinner for a class of special education students from the local school and a story about a nonprofit organization that was preparing Christmas gifts for underprivileged children. The producer also included a story about a student from Anderson College who was killed in an automobile accident the previous weekend.

After the first commercial break, the B block contains more local news that is not considered as important as the news contained in the A block. The “less important” news is sometimes called “soft” news. At this station, this segment also contains national news. The designated national news on this day was a one-and-a-half minute package story taped off the national news feed about the war in Iraq. This was the only national news offered in the broadcast. This segment also contained copy stories about an upgrade at a local airport and a local university that received a grant from NASA. These stories ran together because they were both “money” stories. The next story was about a local high school starting a junior ROTC program. It ran next to the university story because they were both about schools. The Iraq package followed because these two stories were about military. According to the news director, organizing the program with similar stories together helps it “flow better and it’s easier to segue between stories. Easier to transition.”
Easier to listen to and more like a conversation. Everything we do we want to be like a conversation.” Anita noted that she uses the same practice when planning the 6 a.m. broadcast. She said,

You’ve got to mix and match and put things where they fit. If you have a bunch of meetings one day then that’s where you’re gonna put all those meetings today in that day[’s broadcast]. All in one, you know, back to back to back. All those crime stories will go back to back to back, though it’s a lot of death, killing, and….It’s sad, but um, that’s, you know, it flows.

After the next commercial break, the C block contained a “Health Watch” package from the network feed, weather, and a graphic with the winning lottery numbers. In the evening broadcast, the C block always contains these segments, and the Health Watch story is traditionally whatever is offered by the network for the day. Recently, however, the station started producing a health segment themselves once a week because a local hospital became an advertiser. The weather is also produced off-site by non-station staff because this station does not have weather-predicting equipment. Another station, owned by the same company, is approximately 70 miles away and provides the weather segments which are customized for this station with their graphics.

The D block contains sports highlights. The sports segments are new at 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. The 6 a.m. broadcast contains a single one an a half minute taped sports story that is produced the evening beforehand. With the station’s emphasis on local coverage, much of the sports programming is dedicated to high school sports, particularly during football season. There is also considerable coverage of the two major universities in the station’s viewing area. Anita said sports was the “least important” of the program
segments, adding “big sports fans will watch ESPN or something like that. They’re not gonna watch sports [on our station].”

On the day I was there, the E block contained only 75 seconds of programming in the 6 p.m. broadcast. There were two short sports stories and a sports wrap-up. Additionally, twenty seconds were allocated to allow the anchor to sign off and roll the credits.

The other broadcasts during the day were organized in a similar manner. The hour-long 6 a.m. broadcast, however, includes two half hour shows with some additional segments including additional weather, the “Business Brief,” the “Hollywood Minute,” and a funny story. Anita said, “The second show [in the morning] is kind of different here and there, but it’s a lot of the same stuff in the first show. And then a lot of stuff that’s not in the first show is in the second show too, like Money Watch and Health Watch.” The morning show is scheduled like this because most of a morning news audience does not watch the program from beginning to end, but rather they have the morning news on for a short period while they are doing something else like getting dressed or eating breakfast.

*Reporting*

When I made my visit, the station had three reporters. All of them had other duties in addition to being reporters. Michelle was also an evening anchor, while the other two worked on the morning broadcast: Anita was the morning producer/anchor and Holly was the morning assistant producer/editor. Typically, they would receive their reporting assignments from the news director on the day it was scheduled for broadcast or, in the case of those who worked on the morning show, the day before.
On the day of my visit, a Monday, Michelle had been assigned the story about the turkey dinners for the special education students. Holly was assigned the “Operation Christmas Child” story, and Anita was working on a story for a weekly personality profile to be broadcast on Friday. The assignments were made based upon their work schedules. Because the “Operation Christmas Child” story could be covered early in the morning, it was assigned to Holly. This enabled her to begin the coverage as soon as she was finished with her duties on the 6 a.m. broadcast. That show went off the air at 7 a.m., and the site of the story was approximately one hour from the station enabling her to begin reporting around 8 a.m.

Michelle starts the work day at 10 a.m. Since the turkey dinner was not being served until 11:30 a.m., and the family was in the same city as the station, she was assigned this story. Between 10 and 11:15 a.m. she read e-mail messages, checked Internet sites for story ideas, and she also made “beat calls” to the local police stations. She called all the police stations in the viewing area, introduced herself, and asked if there was anything happening that the reporters needed to know about. Although many of the police stations sent out press releases when there was a breaking story, Michelle made these calls every day at some point just to make sure nothing was missed. She said to me, “Sometimes they tell us about something.” To which Robert, who sits across from her in the newsroom answered, “Very rarely,” and he laughed.

About 11:15 a.m., after she called for directions to the house where the turkey dinner was being served, Michelle and I left for the home of the Cannon Family. After we arrived, we were told these special education students were selected because the Cannons run a local food ministry to serve hungry people and the students had helped them pack
boxes of food in the past. They decided to serve the dinner as a gesture of thanks during
the week of Thanksgiving.

Michelle entered the Cannon house in a skirted suit and high heels carrying a
large video camera, microphone, tripod, notebook, and her purse. The students were
coming in the house as Michelle was unloading her gear. As soon as the students got into
the house, the teacher separated about five students who did not have their parents’
permission to be filmed for television. The rest of the students sat at a large table and in
the couches and chairs in the Cannons’ living room. Michelle began filming the scene
and the students. She asked each of them if they wanted to be on television, and when the
responded affirmatively she squatted down to their level with the camera on her shoulder
and asked them questions about their favorite Thanksgiving food. She also asked what
they were thankful for, and she had to prompt a couple of students to say something
besides food. With prompting, the students said they were thankful for the family feeding
them a turkey dinner.

At first the students were shy about appearing on camera, but after two or three
interviews, they all wanted to do it, even the ones who couldn’t be on camera. Michelle
kindly explained that she could only record the ones “at the big table.” Finally she
recorded the teacher, asking her what she thought about the Cannon family giving her
students Thanksgiving dinner. She also asked the teacher what Thanksgiving meant to
her. The teacher had been watching Michelle as she did the close-up interviews with the
students, and volunteered (though Michelle did not ask) that her favorite Thanksgiving
food was the mashed potatoes. They both laughed that she included her favorite food, just
like in the student interviews.
Soon, some more adults from the school showed up including the principal and a coach. A reporter from a local newspaper showed up and asked questions of some of the people working in the kitchen. Michelle moved the camera into the kitchen and began filming the family as they were putting out the food. They had a ham, turkey, greens, soda, sweet tea, rolls, macaroni and cheese, and more. She asked some questions of the people who had prepared the food about why they were offering this meal to the school children and how they had prepared it. She also asked questions of the adults from the school.

Before the students were called to fill their plates, the man whose house it was wanted to say a blessing. The teacher yelled above the noise of everyone talking and asked if anyone objected to a blessing being said. It was hard to hear so she pointed her question to her class and asked if anyone objected to a blessing. No one did, so Mr. Cannon stepped into the living room and gave a short Christian blessing of the food, which Michelle taped.

Next, the students were called by table to go get some food. They were polite to each other, with no pushing, but they moved in a disorganized mass to the serving table. While the students who could be filmed were filling their plates, Michelle taped them. After the students, the teacher, paraprofessionals and the administrators filled their plates, finally the Cannon family filled their plates. Michelle filmed them, and then she walked around and filmed everyone eating. The room where the students were eating was full, so some of the adults moved into the family’s dining room. Michelle interviewed some of them on camera about what Thanksgiving meant to them.
Finally, she asked the hosts to stand by the serving table and do an interview on camera. She asked Mrs. Cannon a couple questions off camera while she was setting up the lavaliere microphone. Michelle directed Mrs. Cannon to look at her (standing next to the camera) while she answered the questions, and Michelle turned the camera on. Michelle asked Mrs. Cannon about how she liked cooking and why she made this big meal for the students. Mrs. Cannon said that she “just loved to cook” and that she had been cooking for years. She said that she had learned to cook from her mother and her grandmother. When asked why she invited the kids over, she said that this was their first time doing it, but that she and her husband really enjoyed the opportunity. She said that the Cannons ran a local food ministry, and her husband was the pastor. Because of this, she was involved in missionary work and had cooked all over the world.

Michelle thanked Mrs. Cannon for her interview and switched the microphone to Mr. Cannon who had been standing next to Mrs. Cannon during her interview. Mrs. Cannon left when it was Mr. Cannon’s turn to speak. Michelle gave similar directions to Mr. Cannon and asked him to say and spell his name. Then she started asking him about the meal and his reason for doing it. He talked about his work as a pastor for Azusa Street Mission Church, which was the name of the food bank. He said that he had been blessed abundantly in his life. He said that he had seven children living in the house, so he was used to his wife preparing big meals. He mentioned that the food ministry was very rewarding and allowed him to travel all over the world. He said he wanted the local school children to enjoy some of the goodness with which he had been “blessed.” He also wanted to thank them for their hard work and help feeding the poor. After she
interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Cannon, Michelle thanked them, packed up her gear, refused an offer to stay for the meal, and headed to a local restaurant for a quick lunch.

**Writing/Editing**

After lunch, the reporters began writing and editing their stories. This function typically happens after lunch, but not always. It depends when the reporter returns to the station with his or her reporting. At this point, the reporter will have all of the raw footage needed, including interviews and shots from the scene of the event upon which he or she is reporting. Each reporter brings it all back to the station and writes a story. Tessa explain the mechanics of the editing process saying, “You focus on the writing more and make sure you are being fair, then you do the video. The video you put down to what you need.” This is not to say that the importance of captivating video should be minimized, however. Tessa also explained,

> For the most part since it’s TV, we want pictures with everything. When we killed stories out of the show today, we killed one that had no video. And one was gas video. I mean how often do you see gas video on TV? A lot. So it wasn’t necessary. But, um, for the most part you need pictures because it’s television. [If] people are looking at this talking head for a half hour, they’re gonna be bored.

The segments that Holly and Michelle were writing were local package stories so the finished pieces were one and a half to two minutes in length. After the story is written, the reporter reads the voice track to tape and then adds the video track to fit with the story in the editing bay. Natural sounds and soundbites from the sources are included in the tracks cut from the raw footage and added to the story. News Director Tessa
describes how she has tried to get the reporters to make the stories they produce more entertaining through editing since the time when she was a reporter at the station:

More natural sounds, um, it’s that background that’s really going on. It’s the natural sound of wherever you are. Using more of that. And just telling more stories. These are like storybook stories. That’s what we’re writing for TV because that’s the entertainment value -- is a story. Like the ‘Once upon a time,’ you know, and the ending. ‘They lived happily ever after.’ … There is no difference.

I joined Holly in an editing booth and watched as she laid down the audio and video tracks for her story about Operation Christmas Child. She began by reading the script she had written and then she went through her raw video tape selecting natural sounds and video to go with her words. I asked how she decided what information to include in her story. She said,

Obviously you can’t get everybody’s opinion on one particular story, but at least you can say here are these people’s opinions. And just maybe kind of enlighten people a little bit. Because there’s always, a lot of times in the story, you’ll have a common belief.

As she was editing, I noted that the story was about the Christian mission of the organizers and that they included Gospel books with each gift package they were wrapping. I asked whether she thought there were any problems including a Christian message in the news. She said that she thought it was important to balance the coverage and that if someone called the station with a similar non-Christian story they would use it. She said they did not have too many people in the audience who were non-Christians, but
that you “have to be careful” or people will call and complain. She said that she was very careful about which soundbites she used because she didn’t want her subjects to be preaching. She said, “You have to be real choosy about what you include and what you don’t. You want to make sure you don’t say [the station] says this.” She said you “approach it like you would anything else, just be fair.”

In spite of her proclaimed interest in including diverse points of view, she said when she is editing she makes a concerted effort to limit the number of people in the story. She said,

You’ll notice that in any particular story there’s not usually a whole lot of people involved. You don’t normally have like 10 people in one story because, not to say that it confuses the viewer, but sometimes you have trouble, like, keeping up. Like who in the heck are all these people? Whereas you can have just one person that you identify with. Like, “Oh. There’s little Jason, and he’s helping with this project.”

The reporters are not the only ones who write and edit stories. All of the stories have to be scripted, even if they are copy stories that will be read by the anchors on air without video. The copy stories are often written or edited by the producer or associate producer. Sometimes these articles are copied verbatim from press releases or other media sources like the Associated Press wires. They are often modified for length and/or clarity, and the facts in the story will be checked with the listed source so the attribution can be removed.

The network feeds provide news packages that are practically ready for use. These stories are typically about a minute-and-45-seconds in length and require little
editing. They are sent to all subscribers including networks, owned and operated stations, affiliate stations, and other subscribers. The 1:45 length makes it easy for producers to use the piece in their broadcasts because it is the same length as most other package stories, and it fits easily into the rundown. After the networks put out the notice that the package will be available later in the day, subscriber stations can even call a telephone number to order a “custom tag” if they plan to use the day’s offering. The custom tag is one sentence at the end of the broadcast where the reporter says something like, “For ‘station X’ this is Jane Doe reporting from Seattle.” By inserting the local station’s name it appears that local reporters are covering national stories around the world. I asked Tessa about the custom tag, and she said it “makes it sound like one of our reporters.” She said it helps the stories “fit the station.” I asked why that was important. She said it “fools the viewers” into thinking that a local reporter was covering the story, but she added, “Don’t say that.” I asked why it was important for viewers to believe the local station was covering the story instead of a reporter from the network. She said that the broadcast seems choppier when there is the perception that reporters are coming from numerous other media outlets, and having a local tag allows the station to “push our brand.”

The lead story on the day I was there came from a wire feed. Robert explained that part of his job was to record stories to tape from the feed (much as one would record programming to tape from a television or computer) and add the custom tag. The technical staff reviews the rundown and assembles all the tapes of individual stories in the order specified for the broadcast. For the General Motors story, however, the tag never came from the network so Robert “had to take what they give us.” Robert was able
to improvise because the station had used stories previously by the same network reporter who was covering the General Motors story. When he was recording the story to tape, he just added a custom tag from an old story by the same reporter, and he ran the audio behind some footage of workers on the assembly line that was included at the end of the supplied package.

Broadcast

The news is broadcast from the studio live at 6 p.m., but the planning begins much earlier. Throughout the day, the staff makes decisions that affect the broadcast. Before the show goes on the air, the anchors read the entire broadcast, paying attention to the stories they are assigned to read. They go through the stories to make sure the stories make sense to them, and they make sure they understand what is being said. The anchors find out how to pronounce words if needed, and they rewrite any sections that have words they would not use or sections that have words or phrases that are difficult to pronounce. By becoming familiar with the stories ahead of time, the anchor can insure that his/her intonation and facial expressions are appropriate on the air. Additionally, by becoming familiar with the story ahead of air time, s/he can help retain his/her composure if a story is exceptionally sad or funny.

The anchors are not the only ones who affect the broadcast. One thing the producer has to decide is which stories will be reader/copy stories and which ones will have video accompaniment. Since television is a visual medium, having interesting video is preferable to reader stories. Anita talked about a recent story she used in the morning show saying, “it was boring. I mean, my voice was great or whatever, and what I wrote
was great, but what you saw was just blah.” She admits that “blah” video is not ideal, but sometimes there is no choice if the story is to be included:

A lot of our [morning show] stories are copy stories, which are just readers.

There’s no video along with it, no interviews along with it, and you just read all that. It’ll be 30 seconds of...people just looking at us on TV. Me or [Holly].

[Holly] fills in for me, and that’s just what you have to do because you have to tell people about this. We did an update on a murder in Athens today, but we never went and covered the story. So we never had video -- a picture of this guy who was murdered -- so I just sat up there and just talked about all these people....

That’s just what happens.

In addition to deciding which treatment stories will get, the producer has to decide which anchor will read which stories in the broadcast. With two anchors in the evening show, the producer has to split up the stories so both anchors have an adequate role in the broadcast. Tessa commented that she was

lucky that I don’t have anchors who fight over who is covering what. [Robert] has told me about some stations where the anchors count the number of words each of them has to say to make sure someone doesn’t get more air time than the they do.

As the producer makes the reading assignments, she has to consider what her story allocation looks like to the viewer. Tessa said that one of her highest priorities was to make sure that the broadcast was like a “conversation.” She had to make sure that there were not too many transitions between anchors. She called this problem the “ping pong effect” and tried to minimize it as much as possible. She also wanted to make sure neither anchor overshadowed the other one, and she tried not to assign more than 50 seconds of
copy or two stories to one anchor before she cut to the other one. She said, “You don’t want the audience to get bored listening to one talking head.”

Avoiding the “ping pong effect” is not the only thing a producer needs to consider when she is making broadcast decisions. Today, many television stations have anchors who are different from each other in age, race, gender, or myriad other ways. These differences often give the producer some characteristics that she can capitalize upon when she thinks it benefits the program. At this station, the morning show anchor, Anita, is a young, light-skinned African-American woman. Her substitute, Holly, is a young, white woman. The two evening show anchors are Michelle, a young, white woman with limited experience, and Robert, a seasoned, white man who has more than 30 years of experience on camera. Tessa said that she takes these characteristics into consideration when she makes the anchors’ assignments. On the day I was there, the broadcast contained a package story about the war in Iraq. She assigned this story to Robert to read because she felt he appeared to be more credible on this subject. She said, “I like him because I have credibility preference. He is a seasoned TV reporter, and I like to hear war news coming from him better than from a young girl who has never worked anywhere but [here].”

The producer also decides which stories will be teased in the broadcast. The teases are played before the story to let viewers know what is coming up and to keep them interested in the show. Most of the time, the stories that are teased are the longer package stories. Michelle describes a news tease as something that would either have the reporter, like I could have done a standup tease out in the field, like “Hey, I’m [Michelle] in Hall County” or “This scene is
where an apparent murder has taken place; I'll have all the details coming up next.” You’re just teasing what you are about to show, trying to get people interested. You’ll only show a little bit of information, but enough so that they’ll have to watch to know what is going on.

This station uses teases before every commercial break during the evening news to let viewers know what is coming up in the broadcast and also to help keep them tuned in for the next block. Additionally, teases are broadcast during commercial breaks throughout the evening if there is an important or breaking story in the 11 p.m. news that night. By giving prime-time viewers information about what news is contained in the news that night, they may be able to keep them tuned in at 11 p.m.

Finally, when news breaks late in the day, changes have to be made to accommodate the new story if the producer schedules it in the broadcast. Since the producer has much of the responsibility for what appears on the air, the duty of making the changes falls to her. The day I was at the station, a murder story broke late in the afternoon. Tessa was uncertain about the value of the story, but she decided to pull Michelle off the anchor desk to investigate the story and cover it if it was newsworthy. Since Michelle would no longer be there to anchor the 6 p.m. show, Tessa had to make changes to the broadcast including reworking camera angles, reassigning all the stories to Robert to read and removing some of the copy stories “because you don’t want [Robert] up there reading that long,” she said.

In conclusion, the decision-making process in the production of a local television news broadcast contains many facets. The news cycle is affected by decisions related to the selection of stories, decisions related to the organization of those stories, decisions
related to the way each story is reported, decisions related to the way each story is written and edited, and other decisions related to the broadcast itself. Each in their own way, every member of the news staff has a role and can make a real and visible impact on the final program that is delivered to the audience each day.

Interests of Stakeholders in the Decision-Making Process

This section addresses the second research question of the study, “How do interests shape the decision-making process?” Inductive analysis revealed four interests in the decision-making process. The first interest examined in this chapter is the pursuit of profitability, which includes generating income by attracting and retaining an audience as well as curbing expenses by limiting resources. Other interests include the reinforcement of prevailing cultural norms and values, reinforcement of the rural narrative, and maintenance of an appearance of objectivity. The interests are outlined in Table 3.

Pursuing profitability

The overwhelming interest found in this study was the pursuit of profitability. Although I do not believe that any of the participants in the study came to work asking himself or herself, “I wonder how I can make a profit for my company today?” the basis from which they operate rewards the attraction and retention of audience share, which increases income. It also limits available resources which decreases expenditures. By increasing revenue and decreasing fiscal outflow, the station spends less and earns more thereby increasing profitability.
Table 3

Interests and Power Relationships of Stakeholders in the Decision-Making Process

Interests.

1. Pursuing profitability
2. Reinforcing prevailing cultural norms and values
3. Reinforcing the rural narrative
4. Maintaining an appearance of objectivity

Power relationships.

1. Economic power relationships
2. Legal/Governmental power relationships
3. Social power relationships

Attracting and retaining an audience.

An interest in securing high ratings was shared universally and overtly by every participant in the study. High ratings are a source of personal pride for reporters and producers, and the pursuit of market share is an unquestionable aim underlying the course of a day’s work. Every single member talked to me about his or her interest in securing the audience, and many of them mentioned explicitly that the desire to attract and retain an audience was directly related to the station’s ability to produce a profit. Although Holly admits that the news program can also be designed to inform (or “educate,” in her words) viewers about the events of the day, the fact that the news is a profit-seeking business is not forgotten. I asked her why it mattered if people cared about what she was covering. She said, “Because then they’ll watch,” and she laughed. I said, “So?” and she explained, “That’s the whole goal of us being in this business. That’s what keeps – That’s
what helps me have a job every day is that people watch.” She added later, “News is a business. You know, even though we’re educating and everything, it is a business.”

Merriam-Webster defines a business as a “commercial or mercantile activity engaged in as a means of livelihood” (Merriam-Webster, 2006). As a mercantile activity, the television station does not have a tangible product to sell, but rather it sells the attention of the programs’ viewers. In this case, businesses pay money to advertise to the viewers who have tuned in to watch the news. The larger the news audience, the greater the reach for the advertising, and the more valuable the space becomes. Therefore, it behooves the producers of the news to attract as large of an audience as possible if they want to maximize their profits. Holly explained how the staff aimed to develop and maintain a consistent viewer base for their programming:

In television it’s all about your numbers, trying to get viewers in. That’s that hook. How are you going to make these people watch? You’re going to do this crazy story, and it’s just like your favorite episode of whatever. You want to catch the next episode. That’s the whole point of sweeps. It’s to do this story on a certain topic where it’s like, “Tune in tomorrow because tomorrow I am going to tell you about blah, blah, blah.” And I am like, “Ohmigod, I have to tune in tomorrow.” So that’s the thing. You’re hooked. You’re trying to get people to watch on a consistent basis, and the thing is they tune in to see your story, but guess what? They’re seeing the story before yours and the story after yours. So, automatically, you have a viewer for that episode, and then they’re like, “This is a pretty good newscast. I think I will watch again tomorrow.” So that’s the whole point. To get the viewers in, to keep them there.
Once viewers watch on a consistent basis, the station can bring in more money by selling advertising to the regular audience. Tessa explained that they wanted their viewers to “keep hearing [the station name] so they will tune in again.” She explained that “the more they watch, the more ads cost, and the more [money] we make.” This statement was made to me less than a half hour into my day-long observation. Robert also explained the impact that viewers can make to the bottom line:

Interviewer: And so what? So what if they don’t watch you. Then…?

Robert: You lose a viewer.

Interviewer: And that impacts you…?

Robert: That’s what, that’s what ratings are all about. You want as many people to watch you as you can.

Interviewer: Because?

Robert: That’s where we make our money.

Interviewer: That is an important thing.

Robert: Very important. That’s how the stations run.

Interviewer: Keeps you in business.

Robert: [If] nobody watches, we aren’t going to make any money.

Michelle took personal pride in her part in securing high ratings. She worked on a breaking murder story on the day of my visit. The story aired during the 11 p.m. broadcast and produced some of the highest ratings in the news program’s history. Of the ratings coup, Michelle said, “Yeah, it was one of the highest ratings our station has ever had, so that’s big. Very big accomplishment.” Although I had already spoken to Robert, I
wanted Michelle to clarify why she thought the high ratings for the night were such an “accomplishment.” I asked,

    Interviewer: So that affects your overall numbers which will increase your advertising rates, which brings in more money, right?
    Michelle: Exactly.
    Interviewer: And that’s a good thing?
    Michelle: That’s a very good thing.

    Much of my conversation with Anita focused on her work as the morning show producer. Although she did not mention profits directly, she did tell me that certain programming considerations were made because of viewer demands. For example, she told me that the morning show audience did not like to watch sports so she included only one-and-a-half minutes of sports reporting in the hour-long show. Also, in the mornings, she said people liked to know the day’s weather forecast, so she included three weather segments to meet their needs. She implied that by giving viewers what they wanted they would be more inclined to watch the programming that her station offered.

    Limiting available resources.

    There is an old maxim that states, “Wealth is not about how much you make, but how much you spend,” and this applies to businesses as much as it applies to individuals. While the participants all actively and explicitly pursued the goal of increasing their ratings in the name of profitability, they also had to contend with the resource limitations imposed upon them by their management. Deadline pressures and limited personnel are two ways the station maximizes the resources at its disposal. These limitations affect the broadcast message by hindering the telling of a complete story.
The daily nature of the program means the staff has to produce a broadcast every day by 6 p.m. in the case of the evening news. Meeting the deadline pressure means they have to fight against the clock. Tessa mentioned that they never seem to have enough time to do the reporting they want to do. She said,

Time is always working against you. In fact, I told you earlier we’re a bunch of type-A personalities so everybody wants everything perfect, so it’s good that we have time restraints because otherwise we’d work on our stories forever. Um, there are days when you get back at 5 o’clock, and this has to be in at 6, and you just have to do the best you can. … You try to get the information out there the best you can. And for it to be right. And then everything else is second.

Anita and Holly also mentioned that they would regularly work 12 hour days, taking lunch “if I have time.” Anita even confessed that her work hours had cost her a romantic relationship, saying,

But it is hard. It’s a lot of long hours with this, but, I don’t see myself putting that much time into any other job, to tell you the truth. I would do this. I don’t know why. I’m crazy. [laughs.] And a lot of people-- It is hard for you-- If you want to find somebody to date, it’s hard because they don’t understand this business. My current-- My boyfriend I had when I moved here can’t understand it, and that came between us. We’re not together any more… I mean that was the main reason. We’re friends, but that was a huge thing.

In spite of the personal and professional setbacks, time constraints are generally accepted as a frustration that comes with the job. Anita described her frustration collecting material from sources for one of her stories who showed up late for an
interview. She said “They think you can stay on a story for two hours, and they want to tell you all this stuff… ‘Well, let me show you this. Let me show you that.’ … You can’t do all of that.” Holly also expressed a desire for sources to get to the point during interviews. She said,

When we go and we interview people, they’re saying a whole bunch of crap that you probably don’t need, and you’re like… [gestures to say, “Get on with it.”]

Then you wait for that one delicious soundbite, and you’re like, “That’s what I was looking for.” You’re like, “Write that down!”

As a result of the time pressures, the reporters are not always able to develop a story as fully and include diverse points of views as if they did not have the pressure to meet their deadlines. Holly admitted the demands of filling the newscast sometimes limit the story that gets told. She said,

So it is difficult, and you are limited, one by time, and one, by obviously you can’t get everybody’s opinion on one particular subject, but at least you can get what you can. And maybe you can get that one person who maybe doesn’t believe what everyone else believes so they can get a different point of view across. So, it does affect it, but I mean, there’s not much you can do about it. You do what you can.

A small staff like the one at this station will keep personnel costs down, but the broadcast can be affected by the shortfall. First, a small staff means more work is shared among fewer people. To save salary expenses, the workload is spread among the small staff that is available. Reporters at this station engage in “one-man-band” style of reporting. This term is used to describe reporting where one person single-handedly
writes, photographs, edits, produces, and reports stories. Typically, the reporter goes to
the scene and works as the photographer while asking questions of the sources (reporting)
from behind the camera. If the reporter appears on camera, it means the camera has been
set up to run unassisted on a tripod, and the reporter steps in front of it. I asked Tessa why
the station uses this arrangement, and she said, “Because we’re paying one person to do
the job of two.”

Additionally, the breadth of local reporting is often shortchanged when the staff
has to rely on others’ stories from network feeds. Robert explained why they use the
Health Watch segments from the network feed. He said,

We would do it locally instead of nationally. … But, the disadvantage of that is a
reporter who would normally be doing a news segment is taken out of that loop
and devoting her day to doing a Health Watch segment. … Which is something,
like I said, we could easily do through the network feeds.

I asked if Tessa had any hesitations about relying on a reporter’s story when it comes off
the feed and the person does not work for her station. She said that sometimes she knew
the photographers when the story came out of Atlanta, and in most cases she was not
concerned. Then I asked her what she does when she does not know the photographer,
she said, “Hope they care as much about their product as you do.”

Because they do not have enough people to cover all the news in a day, the
breadth of the reporting can be compromised. While the use of previously recorded video
saves having to send the reporter to the scene of a story when it can be reported from the
newsroom, it also limits the story selection to those for which there is existing video. For
example, the story about the pre-opening of the Atlanta aquarium on the day of my visit
used video they had saved from a previous report. Tessa told me, “It saves person-hours. [The reporters] can work on other stories.” Anita said she employs the practice in the 6 a.m. show. I asked if she thought the practice was disingenuous. She shook her head no and said,

You say “News file” [on the video]. You put on there when it was. You’ll have the date when it was. Like we had mug shots for people, so you’re telling them, “Hey this happened a while ago, but this is still--” You know. Especially with the courthouse guy, Brian Nichols in Atlanta, we always have to show his old video because there’s not really that much new video of him. But you just put “News file” and make the date where it came from. Hurricane Katrina stuff. Any hurricane [since it only happens once]. Hugo or something. … You have to let them know.

Finally, the pressure of this work environment can lead participants to dehumanize their subjects, regarding the people in their stories more as mere content than as human beings. For example, late in the day of my observation, Tessa received a phone call telling her that someone had been shot in their viewing area, and there was a possible murder. By this time, the reporters who worked on the morning show had left for the day, and the only reporter in the newsroom was Michelle, who was getting ready to anchor the 6 p.m. newscast with Robert. Tessa decided that the story was worth investigating, and she assigned it to Michelle instead of anchoring the news that evening. Before Michelle went out to the scene, however, Tessa tried to get her more information about exactly where it happened by first calling the sheriff’s department (to no avail), and then by calling a local radio station where she had a close friend who was news director. The
news director at the radio station had not heard about the shooting yet, so she answered his questions about it on the telephone, saying, “I don’t know. I heard somebody’s dead. I sure hope so. I know that’s a horrible thing to say, but I pulled my anchor off the desk to cover it, so I hope somebody’s dead.” There was quiet on her end of the line like he was checking some other resource. A couple seconds later she shouted, “HA! HA! HA! Somebody’s dead! Oh. Close to dead. Critically injured! Benefield. Where? Say that again. How do you get there?” He said he wasn’t sure, and she joked with him saying, “Ha ha! You’re just not on your game.”

Tessa reacted the way she did because a death would affirm her decision to pull Michelle off the anchor desk. However, Robert, who was about to leave his shift, had other reasons for hoping the victim died. Because the anchors go home after the 6 p.m. broadcast, any changes that are made to the 11 p.m. taped broadcast have to be decided by that time. At 6:30 p.m., Robert had to record the teases that would play throughout the rest of the evening for the new stories added to the 11 p.m. broadcast. He said a critically injured victim was the “worst situation” because they did not know if the victim would die by 11, and it was “hard to tease” the story without that knowledge.

In conclusion, one of the primary interests in the decision-making process of producing television news centers around the pursuit of profitability. The station is profitable if it can increase the number of people watching each night and sell the advertising space for more money. Likewise, by keeping personnel costs down while still producing a daily broadcast, they can cut spending. Earning more and spending less are the two sides of a careful balancing act in which the participants must produce the most attractive product possible for the lowest cost.
Reinforcing prevailing cultural norms and values

One of the primary ways that the participants attracted and retained an audience was by reflecting the desires and characteristics of the audience and giving them what they believe the audience wants in their daily programming. Although it is impossible for a mass medium to reflect the views and positions of everyone in the audience, by reflecting the views and positions of a majority they will retain the largest audience share possible. As a result, the net influence of the broadcast ultimately reinforces the prevailing (majority) cultural norms and values.

The participants conduct their reporting and broadcast production with a generalized idea of their audience in mind, and they cater to the perceived wants and needs of their audience. The staff at this station told me their audience is mostly older, white, Christian, conservative and rural – and interested in local news. Tessa told me explicitly that they do tailor programming to their audience. She said,

We have a lot of older viewers, so we do some older issues. Um, prescription Medicare that’s coming out. We’re real hot on that. We’ve done one story and possibly another one tomorrow depending on what happens [in the legislature].

Um, we just like to do older issues, because we have an older audience.

Also, she believes that the audience is interested in seeing local coverage. She said, “They watch to see their kids on TV. You know…. The people around here are very interested in what’s going on in their counties and cities, so they watch to see those things.”

The staff’s ideas about who their audience is, however, is not always favorable, but they claim they do work to change stereotypes. Tessa told me “Most of our audience
here is white” and then added, “Here in [this city], they’re still pretty racist.” Even Anita, the only black staff member at the station, experienced racial discrimination from members of the community. She admitted that people in the audience would sometimes single her out when she was covering a story. She said,

I’ll go out on stories, and some people pull me off to the side, and these are white guys, older white guys, and they’ll say, “Has everybody been OK to you? I mean, has anybody treated you badly?” “No, everything’s fine.” [laughs.] You know, um, it’s been a few times that that’s happened.

Although she also said “I haven’t had any bad experiences at all,” her next utterance was, “but it’s funny how people act or they’re shocked that I am even here. They’re like, ‘You work here? You’re not from around here, are you?’ ‘No.’ I get that a lot.” She also talked about a specific experience she had when she was covering a story about a Confederate flag rally, and she discounted the direct experiences she had with racism. She said, “Everyone was nice. Except one guy wouldn’t shake my hand. It was weird, but everyone else was so nice.”

The commitment to changing stereotypes seems to be mostly superficial. Tessa said, “You don’t want an all white show. You want to get all kinds of races and people and stuff to interview so that you show that there’s a lot of people out there that besides just white doctors.” She talked about one way to develop a more inclusive show -- by explicitly including minorities in the broadcast -- but her comments about engaging in such a practice were apologetic. She said,

Um, I used to, and I probably shouldn’t admit this, but I am going to, I used to try to curb stereotypes, like if I saw a black doctor, I was so going to interview him
and show people, like, “Hey, this is a well-spoken black guy.” So I would try to, like, change things like that.

Although Tessa claimed this was something that could be done, and said it was a practice in which she engaged, she did not point to any specific examples where this practice was employed.

Rather, Tessa seemed to hold a stronger position that it was the responsibility of the news to reflect the community. I asked if she thought the media should shape or reflect community interests. She said,

Not shape! Not at all. Unless it means, “Hey they’re passing this zoning ordinance, go to your county commission meeting.” You know. Whether you want it or not, go, and tell them what you want…. If you mean shaping that way, but as far as telling people what the community should be like, no. Our job is to reflect what is going on out there.

This position can be problematic for minorities who rarely or never see their position reflected in the mass media. I raised this issue with Tessa, asking specifically how she justified including a Christian message in both of the locally-produced package stories on the day of my visit. One was Holly’s “Operation Christmas Child” story and one was Michelle’s “turkey dinner” story which featured the pastor of a mission praying in front of school children in the broadcast. Tessa said,

We can get away with it….I mean the guy was praying for dinner, and these people [the schoolchildren] helped their mission by packing boxes throughout the year, so now they’re getting food. But we can get away with a little more of that because we are such a Christian area.
She emphasized her point by repeating to me that because the viewing area was primarily Christian, and that everyone in the local community prayed, it was acceptable to include a Christian message in the broadcast. She said,

But they all do it. This whole area, so we can get away with it. I mean people pray at lunch. Like you go to a business lunch, and people pray before they eat and stuff. So, it’s alright to do here. …We’re not pushing it; we’re immersed in it, so it’s OK to put it on.

Finally, I raised the question of discrimination with her specifically by asking, “But certainly you have viewers who are not Christian?” She replied, “Right, but it’s so much a part of our community that showing it on TV isn’t pushing it on people, it’s really how our community is. It reflects how it is.”

Michelle’s explanation for incorporating an overtly Christian message into her story was that it was a “coincidence” that she included a pastor praying in the finished story. She said the inclusion of this particular piece was her effort to enhance the construction of the story. She explained,

The prayer? Now, this was so not any religious type thing I was trying to put in there, like hey, these people are religious. I wasn’t trying to… I guess it is kind of a coincidence that a.) they’re praying and they do minister, but that was just called a ‘nat sound’ break, sometimes that’s just a nice way to separate a bunch of words. You know, this was considered words, but it’s different from interviewing and hearing my track.

I pressed her further by wondering to her why, after collecting audio and video footage for almost an hour and a half at the Cannons’ home that it was the “natural sound” of the
prayer she included in the final story. Again, she said it was a “coincidence” without mentioning that the editing of the story (and resulting selection of texts) took place after she learned about the family’s Christian mission. She said, “I think that was probably more coincidence than anything. I didn’t really know going into it. I didn’t know they were in charge of Azusa Ministries. So I had no idea that they were that, so that was mere coincidence.”

It seemed strange to me that such overt messages could be incorporated as a “mere coincidence” when the reporter lays down the audio and video tracks second-by-second during editing. Even Michelle admitted that the reporter does control how people are portrayed in the story. I asked her if it was a coincidence that she had shown an overweight person in the video when she said in the story, “I hope they have a hearty appetite.” She admitted that the inclusion of the video was something that she can control, and rather than a “coincidence” she characterized this inclusion as an oversight, and one without much consequence, saying,

Yeah, that was poor of me. Maybe not using the best judgment. I should have looked over that one more time. That’s one thing where our video can get us in trouble. We have to be so careful whenever we say stuff like that. … There, I don’t think mattered too much, but…

In the end, Michelle justified the inclusion of the Christian emphasis the same way Tessa did, saying that it was acceptable to include it “‘cause this part of the region is very religious, and there’s a church on-- You know, you could throw a rock at all the churches.”
The final construction of a story does not happen by accident. Audio and video are scripted by the reporters, and the tracks are laid down frame-by-frame. As much as the participants acknowledge that they can help counteract stereotypes, the more often traveled route is the one where they can offer the opinions and viewpoints of the majority of their audience members by reflecting what the audience thinks and believes. However, by reflecting prevailing interests, the broadcast ultimately reinforces the prevailing cultural norms and values held by their audience.

Reinforcing the rural narrative

Another interest that influenced the production of the news at this television station was the reinforcement of the rural narrative. Beyond reinforcing the cultural norms and values of the older, white, Christian, conservative viewer base, the decisions behind the programming were often motivated by a strong anti-urban, particularly anti-Atlanta, mindset. The stations in Atlanta are unanimously characterized as purveyors of “bad news” who seek out crime and drama, engage in unscrupulous reporting, and generally threaten the rural identity of this station and its audience. By identifying themselves as decidedly “anti-Atlanta” and utilizing common journalistic practices that limit critical thought, frame debate and homogenize reporting, the prevailing political agendas are allowed to flourish.

The participants characterized their station as different from larger stations in other markets. They claimed that by being in a more rural area they could more easily cover positive stories about the local community, and this was what the mostly conservative, rural, white audience wanted. Tessa noted, “We don’t have the crime Atlanta has everyday. So we get to do the, ‘These people are cooking dinner for special
ed kids.’ You know. Things like that. We get to do a lot more good stories.” Anita said she hears from viewers that they like that her station is the local “good news” station and that they’re different from Atlanta. She thinks this is a good thing. She said “I didn’t realize until you go out into the community and they tell you, ‘We love your newscast because Atlanta doesn’t do this … but y’all will’ because we’re news for Northeast Georgia.” She also added that the “good news” stories were the kind of stories that she thought the viewers of her station’s broadcast liked to see. She said,

They don’t want to see all this [bad news]… They don’t want to be depressed. And a lot of people tell me they don’t watch the news because they don’t want to be depressed. And that’s all that’s on [Atlanta stations]. And so that’s why I’m like, “Well, at MY station, it’s not like that. We don’t do it that way. No.” You know, there are a lot of good things.

In fact, the participants had what seemed like an obsession about differentiating themselves from the stations in Atlanta, a market from which most of their viewers can also receive news. Tessa told me, “We’re the nice people. Come talk to us. When Atlanta comes up, people don’t want to talk to them.” Talking about differentiation, Robert described unscrupulous journalistic practices in Atlanta that he “vehemently opposed” like the use of “look lives” which is when the reporter appears to be live on the scene of a story, but in fact the reporting is pre-recorded. He also talked about how the larger stations, particularly one of the Atlanta stations, would often report old news saying it was breaking news when they reported it days later. He stated that his station would never do such things. He said,
The larger stations are not as strict about some things, yeah. Scrupulous, is the right word. Yes. … These kinds of things slip into the newscast in the larger, larger markets. …I worked there for a long time, and you fight against it diligently.

Interviewer:  Wow, I think that would be trying after awhile.


While she never explicitly called the Atlanta stations a threat, Tessa contrasted her programming to theirs saying that her station’s programming aimed to preserve the status quo. She said,

We’re not going to show naked people or say curse words on TV, and like we said earlier, I can get away with a little bit of that Christian twist in our stories because it reflects our community. Atlanta’s not necessarily going to do that, because they have a bigger mix of people. So, yeah, it’s pretty much the status quo.

She claimed that it was her station’s prerogative to cover stories in her area, saying, “We’re the local station. We want to be on top of it. We want to be there first. We don’t ever want Atlanta to beat us to a story.” At the same time, she also seemed chagrined about some “bad news” stories from her area that were receiving coverage in other places. For example, she told me she chose not to include the story about a 37-year-old local woman who married a 15-year-old boy in the broadcast on the day I observed. She said part of the reason she did not include the story was because the stations in Atlanta were covering it. She said,
Our audiences want to know what’s the latest on it, but they don’t really want to be submerged in it. You know. They can do that on theirs. It fits into their – especially channel 2’s – you know, murder, robbery, you know, weird child molester thing. But we’re not necessarily like that…. It’s weird. It’s crazy, but it’s not something our viewers-- I mean, they’re talking about [this story], but if we throw it in their face all the time, like Atlanta does, then they associate us with them, and we want to do exactly the opposite. We want to be the anti-Atlanta. Hey, watch us instead.

She explained that the stations in Atlanta “search out” crime stories, adding that “They’ll come in to our coverage area if it’s controversial or if it’s dead. That’s it.” She criticized recent coverage about a small plane crash in her viewing area that was covered by Atlanta media. She said,

There’s no reason for them to come up here for a small plane crash. … It’s one person. Who does it affect, you know? But if it affects a lot of people, then, of course, yeah, you want them here, but if it’s only that one person in that little plane at an airport especially, where there’s no traffic, no people involved, they’ll be up here because they want that, “Oooo. Somebody got hurt.” Well, you know, we’ll only do it if it affects a lot of people.

Interviewer: But you do cover single deaths…

Tessa: Yeah. We, we do cover it, we just don’t seek it. I guess that wasn’t a very good example.

While the coverage by stations in Atlanta may have threatened the ideas that the participants had about their viewing area, the reporting practices at this station were not
much different than at other stations. Indeed, the reporting practices used here helped to protect the existing opinions about the community. For one thing, the format of news at this station requires that the staff produce a half-hour newscast in the evenings. Research showed that much of the “good news” was in fact selected simply because there is space to fill and the story is easy to access. On the day of my observation, the two locally produced package stories that Tessa included in the rundown were the kind of “good news” stories Anita said that the viewers like to see. However, Tessa let me know she did not believe the Turkey Dinner story was terribly valuable even though she scheduled it in the broadcast that day. In an e-mail to Michelle she said about the story, “You made chicken salad.” I asked what she meant by that statement. She paused, smiled at me and said, “…out of chicken shit.” She meant that the story was not very good to begin with, and she thought Michelle made it more interesting.

I wondered why Tessa would include a story she did not think was interesting in the rundown and found the reason those stories were selected for that day was because she “did not have anything better” to put in the space. Anita told me, “A lot of times there isn’t anything going on, and we’re all doing happy stories.” I asked if she was telling me that the happy stories are used “when there is nothing else going on” and she replied,

It’s bad to think like that, I guess. Sometimes you do think that news has to be the murder, death, kill, horrible job loss stories. And then—[Pause.] It is bad that you think that way.

Michelle echoed this sentiment saying that the likely reason a story about feeding turkey dinners to special education students was included was because it was a slow news day. She said, “I think one of the main reasons why we did the story was ‘cause it was a
slower time, and it was the holidays.” I asked Tessa if this reason resonated with her. I said, “So when you don’t have enough bad -- You still have to fill 30 minutes, and you put things like, like--” She completed my sentence with “Turkey dinners?” Then she laughed and said, “Yeah. Yeah. I mean. The lady just cooking turkey dinners for those kids. You would never see that on the Atlanta station. Never. But it’s what’s going on around here, and it’s what people care about.”

With so much happening in the community on any given day, it is curious that these “good news” stories are what fill the holes in the broadcast. What the stories do, actually, is limit critical thinking about the local environment by presenting a carefully crafted picture that only shows a sliver of what is happening on a given day. The viewers and the participants can identify with the local station as their station covering their issues (which, of course, are “good”). In this way, the perception of a kinder, gentler place is perpetuated, compared to the crime and horrors that happen in the big city of Atlanta.

This is not to say that there was no coverage of “bad news” in the broadcast. There was. A closer look at the leading stories, however, shows the worst of the day’s “bad news” posed little threat to the political agenda being perpetuated by the station. The three leading stories were about job losses, death, and theft. However, the presentation of these stories – a 1:55 package from the network feed, and two copy stories (no video) of 20 and 32 seconds respectively – framed the worst of the “bad news” as relatively insignificant.

There is a formula to which producers adhere that says that stories are ordered by their importance. Anita says it is taught in school and admits “I guess in a way we all do
think that way with putting stories in certain orders.” Tessa said she adheres to the journalistic standard, but said she hates the term “if it bleeds, it leads” because “it’s not always true.” In spite of her stated belief that “we’re not gonna lead with it just because it’s crime,” these three “bad news” stories were placed higher in the broadcast than the locally produced “good news” packages.

Though the stories were given positions of relative importance in the broadcast, their significance is debatable. On this day, the first story, the lead story, was a one-minute-and-55-second package story from the network feed about layoffs at a General Motors plant in Doraville, near Atlanta. Robert advocated for the GM plant closing/job loss story as the lead story because it “was one of those days we didn’t have a compelling lead story.” Afterward, I noted to him that the story did not even occur in their viewing area. I said, “It was actually a national news story,” because they had taken it from the feed. He agreed, saying, “It was nationwide, but it also affected a plant that’s not too far from here. Three thousand workers at a plant right down the road.” In fact “right down the road” was nearly in the middle of Atlanta, where their broadcast is not received, but Robert said that a lot of people from the station’s viewing area go to work there or are retired from the plant so it would be a good choice for a lead story. Tessa defended the decision also saying “today, a lot of people lost jobs” so “you have to lead with that stuff.”

Next was a 20-second copy story about an Anderson College student getting killed in a car accident while going to a Clemson football game, and third was a 32-second copy story about people breaking into drink machines in a local city to steal the money. Both of these stories were short and neither had video to contribute to the story’s
impact. Actually, Tessa debated putting the car accident story after the story about turkey dinners, but changed her mind because the victim was driving to the Clemson-South Carolina football game, where many of the staff had been over the weekend, and she decided it “could have been any one of us.” In fact, she considered the inclusion of the story so high in the broadcast to be a public service. She said she was reminding people that the roads can be dangerous. Further, she said the news business was “harsh enough as it is” but that she “wanted to show respect to at least one family” by not putting the story about their child’s death after a “lightweight” story like one about a local pastor and his family feeding turkey dinners to some special education students from the school down the street.

By delivering a mixture of messages in a particular way, the station can frame the debate about the “good” and “bad” happenings in the community so that even the community’s “bad news” can be presented in a non-threatening way. This format provides security for viewers, and their political agenda remains intact.

Third, most of the segments in the day’s broadcast came from outlets that were accessible to other news directors and producers around the state and country. These outlets include the Associated Press wire service, local newspapers and their websites, and the network feeds. By using the same stories all over the state or country, the effective control of the message is concentrated but their impact on any particular local area is diluted.

Tessa explained that although you do have to be a network affiliate to use the network feed, many stations across the country use the same stories. She said,
Anybody can use [the] CNN [feed]. Um, there are times when we run the same health story as [a different network’s affiliate] station in Greenville because we both pulled them off CNN that day. So that happens, and it’s confusing. Same thing with [our network feed] though ‘cause [the Atlanta network station] will run some of the same packages we will. Like they definitely didn’t run the Doraville story because they’re there, but they may have run the Iraq package today. So they’re running the same package we are.

Tessa explained that it was an acceptable practice to use the same stories other media outlets were using. She said the network feeds are a service [the networks] provide so it’s known that all these people are gonna use it. It’s like the AP wires. We pay for that. We pay for [network] feeds, so we’re buying their reports…. This stuff is meant to be distributed. That’s the purpose of it.

Interestingly, in spite of the station’s commitment to local reporting, Tessa felt more comfortable using stories from the national network feed than from the local newspaper. She said taking a story from the paper was “way different” than using a story from the network feed “because we’re stealing [the newspaper story] from them basically. It’s their work. It’s copyrighted.” Though she would attribute newspaper stories or check the facts herself (or have a reporter do it), I asked if she was concerned about accuracy when she relied on others’ reporting, and she said, “How do we know that it’s right? Well, we just hope so.”

Relying on stories that are widely distributed for information about what is happening locally helps diffuse the impact of any one story. This kind of reporting is
homogenized because it is designed to appeal to media outlets across a wide geographic area. By using these types of stories, the prevailing political ideas about the local area remain intact and free from critical questions.

In conclusion, by distancing themselves from the stations in Atlanta, and capitalizing on the good news and identifying with it, the station legitimizes certain topics and delegitimizes others thereby reinforcing the rural character of their audience. This is done by filling holes in the broadcast with stories that depict the area the way the viewers like to see it. Second, by using a standard journalistic protocol for reporting the news, the station creates the frame through which negotiation of meanings can be constructed, thereby limiting debate. Last, by relying on many of the same stories as other media outlets, negative threats to prevailing opinions are diluted enabling prevailing local agendas to flourish.

_Maintaining an appearance of objectivity_

All the while working to pursue profitability, reinforce prevailing cultural norms and values, and reinforcing the rural narrative, the participants took pains to maintain an appearance of objectivity to their audience. Although the participants acknowledged that their reputation as a balanced, credible source of information about what was happening in the world was important to audience retention, the inclusion of multiple points of view and/or the inclusion of all the facts surrounding any given story did not always happen. Sometimes this exclusion was intentional, and sometimes it was not. In any case, the story that was broadcast often included biases and omissions that affected whose version of events were told and how.
To these respondents, objectivity is considered necessary to building a reputation that will attract and retain an audience. In this study, objectivity is used to mean a journalistic norm that encompasses values including neutrality, fairness, and balance. Every one of the participants mentioned an adherence to these values. Robert explained, “You don’t ever want to be caught cheating or lying to your audience. They’ll never watch you again.” I asked Tessa what she thought made her broadcasts believable to her viewers. She replied,

That comes with time, and not making mistakes. …It really is reputation that helps them believe me. Um, and not making things up. I mean, you can’t make things up, and you have to be truthful. That’s something that we do have. … We just tell the news. And we tell it like it is. And we tell it how people can understand it. And that’s why people like us.

One way participants create the appearance of objectivity is by presenting multiple points of view in a story. Viewers cannot be everywhere at once to talk to all the people involved in any given story, so they rely on the resources of the media to provide access to various constituencies about important topics of the day. Holly says,

The whole point is to be fair, and hopefully people will appreciate that. Hopefully people aren’t watching the news to just to say, “I want them to repeat everything that I believe.” [Laughs.] Hopefully they’re watching to get educated. To be entertained. To whatever you want them to do. And, that’s the goal. They’ll know, “[Holly], ohmigod, she always gives both sides of the story. That’s what I like to see. Both sides of the story.” So, hopefully, that will make them tune in tomorrow because they know that ABC in Atlanta is only going to give Joe Schmo’s point
of view which is wrong! [Laughs.] Or which is this crazy, angry person, and I don’t even know what the real side of the story is. So hopefully, they’re tuning in to see that you want to give both sides of the story.

Holly explains further that she feels it is part of her responsibility as a reporter to give people complete information about a given issue, and she says this role is part of what attracted her to this line of work. She says,

People always ask you why you get into reporting, and there’s a lot of different reasons, but one of the main reasons was to educate people. To get them both sides of the story, and I won’t say this happens a lot, but you see stories, and you know you see them, where you know it’s one sided. And you’re like, “OK, well what about Joe down the street? You didn’t ask him what he thought.” So, in my opinion, it’s to get out both sides of the story and try as much as you can, as human beings, it’s hard to do, but try as much as you can to be unbiased and to be fair and to say, “Here’s this side, and here’s that side,” and “There’s the information.” You know, to just kind of lay it out there.

The media can serve as this intermediary, but the role provides challenges and ethical concerns for those who produce the broadcast. Tessa explains that those who produce the television stories have to contend with human biases just like anyone else, and they can affect the final product. She says,

There are so many different factors that we have to deal with in a day, and a lot of people don’t realize that. And we are people. I mean, you’re trusting what we say, and you’re trusting us to be fair. But we’re still writing these stories, and we try not to have biases, and this is one of those other unspoken media things that we’re
not supposed to say, but everybody has ‘em. And it may not come out obviously. It will never be obvious. You don’t want it ever to be obvious, but um, you want to be as fair as you can be. … You don’t want it to happen, but everybody has some sort of bias. Whether I like Fords better than Chevys, and I do a story on cars, I may pick a Ford to drive instead of a Chevy…. You know. Little things like that are all through the news.

On the day of my observation, I found that the degree that a story is “balanced” can be calculated in multiple ways. Holly was working on a local package story about some volunteers preparing shoebox gifts for underprivileged children. The mission was called “Operation Christmas Child.” The volunteers were part of a Christian group, and many of them felt that preparing and distributing these shoebox gifts was a Christian “calling.” The box contained, among other things, a Christian-focused coloring book and a booklet of Gospel stories. The sources Holly interviewed at the scene were both white, Christian males. She said they were diverse because one was the project organizer, and one was a student who was helping pack the boxes. However, their race, gender, and opinion about the mission of the project were very similar. I asked Holly how she chose the people she interviewed for the story noting to her that she selected interviews with two white Christian males which did not seem to lend itself to presenting a terribly balanced story. In fact, I said it seemed that she had made a concerted effort to include opinions that she was likely to find among her viewers. When she realized I was questioning her reporting decisions, she began to get defensive explaining,

Sometimes you are also limited to what you have available. Like I talked to the main guy because he is the main guy, and he knows the most about the program
so… Not that I am obligated, but he would be the best person to talk to because he has the most information. And then, of course, I am limited because of the teacher [who recommended the boy as a spokesperson]. I asked the teacher who she wanted me to talk to, and that goes into like, you know, legal ramifications and mommas and daddies getting upset and that sort of thing, so I have to -- I don’t have to go with, but obviously it’s in my best interest to go with who she tells me to go with, so…. I was actually going to actually interview one of the older people in the group. She was just a church member, and she was actually, you know, an elderly woman and that sort of thing, so-- Um, like I said. The story doesn’t always go the way you plan, and you can’t always-- As you said, we’re human. We can’t always go the way we would like to. We can’t always have, you know, a black person, a Hispanic person, an Asian per-- [Laughs.] You know, it doesn’t always work that way, so…like I said, with this particular story, it just happened to work out that way…. And it, even though you consciously try to do it, you consciously try to get a different feel for it, if it doesn’t happen, you can’t obsess about it because I know, personally, I didn’t choose those people because they’re white males, blah, blah, blah, you know. I know that I chose them because that’s just the way the circumstances worked out, so I am not gonna make myself sick about it because I know I wasn’t being, you know, trying to be one-sided or anything like that. So you, just like I said before, you do the best you can.

[Laughs.]

An objective story can be created by including multiple, diverse spokespersons to represent different points of view, but in their absence, it can also be created by insuring
that multiple, diverse positions are outlined in the story. This commitment was not always practiced as it was preached, however. In one case, Tessa chose to forsake a more complete story because including the additional information would make it less interesting. While she was writing introductory material for the story about the layoffs at the General Motors plant in Doraville, I mentioned to her that I used to work for General Motors, and I even did public relations for them during a strike. I asked if any of the information she had mentioned the conditions of the United Auto Workers’ contracts with General Motors. Particularly, I wondered if she knew that even if the unionized employees were laid off they still made a large percentage of their more than $20/hour average salary when they were not working. She said that she had not seen that information anywhere. Then she told me it is a “better story if people are laid off right before the holiday without noting that they’re still being paid.” She made no effort to confirm nor deny the information I provided. While she continued writing, I watched CNN which was playing on a television in her office. At that moment they had a segment about the layoffs. I told her that CNN reported in the very last sentence of its story that General Motors planned to “help the workers through the transition” but the reporter did not explain what kind of help was being offered. Tessa said half-jokingly, “Don’t listen to [CNN].” Then she repeated her previous comment saying, “You know why they don’t report that? It’s a better story if they don’t.” No information about salary continuance was included in anything she wrote.

The exclusion of particular facts can also help shape the story so that it appears that the station has a neutral position about the subject. For example, in Michelle’s turkey dinner story, the students who were invited for the meal were from a local school’s
special education program. Nowhere in the story, however, was their status as special education students mentioned. Robert mentioned it in his introduction, and the graphic identification of the teacher, also called the “super,” identified her as “Special Ed. Teacher” but it was never mentioned in Michelle’s reporting. She always called the students “middle schoolers,” “students” or “kids.” I asked why she did not mention that they were special education students. She said,

I didn’t feel this story was important to really acknowledge that this were special education students. Um, they didn’t have physical disabilities that you could see, so I didn’t want, you know they might have had like learning disabilities, and that’s why they’re in this class. I didn’t think it was important to call this out to the story. That didn’t have anything to do with it, so that’s kind of why I went the other way to make sure we didn’t say, “Hey, these special ed students are getting special treatment,” so you know, that’s kind of why I did that way. … If it would have been something more strongly, you know, the special ed kids would be rewarded for something that had to be with special education or they had just, you know, gotten out of special education class, they passed a test, you know, then I would have made more of it. But really they all, the reason they were being honored was because they had helped the Cannon family out in the ministry so now they were being rewarded, so it didn’t matter.

Heather disagreed with Michelle’s decision not to identify the students’ special education status, but she said she would have highlighted this fact only because it made a good “selling point.” She said,
I didn’t particularly like her story because in the story she didn’t say anything else ever again about them being special education. Which I didn’t think that story should be focused, “Oh they’re special education.” But I definitely thought it was a selling point.

In fact, neglecting the students’ special education position rendered their non-mainstream status invisible. By submerging this special characteristic, the story promotes a neutral, homogeneous, objective appearance to the reporting. I wanted to make sure I understood Michelle’s motivations for excluding this information from her story. I confirmed, “The special ed kids were not singled out for being special ed so they were blended in with mainstream society, and in that way you were able to give people what they – not ruffle any feathers?” She replied, “Right.”

Maintaining the appearance of objectivity is important to the participants in this study because they want to maintain a reputation among their viewers as a reliable, consistent source for news. But sometimes their “objectivity” is really a smokescreen that allows for the telling of only a certain version events, ultimately producing a story that is anything but objective.

In conclusion, the interests of stakeholders in the decision-making process of producing television news include four primary interests. Foremost among them is the pursuit of profitability. By attracting and retaining an audience the participants work to increase their income while station management works to limit available resources thereby reducing expenditures. A second interest is reinforcing prevailing cultural norms and values. By reflecting the values and opinions of the audience in an effort to identify with the greatest number of people possible, the broadcast reinforces the cultural norms
and values held by the majority. Third, the broadcast reinforces the rural narrative by claiming to distinguish itself from its competition. However, the journalistic practices and policies common to the industry actually serve to limit critical thought, frame debate and homogenize reporting. Finally, by creating an appearance of objectivity the program appears to be a credible source of news. However, by manipulation or by bias, the resulting production is often slanted to present the point of view held by a singular interest group.

Power Relations and the Decision-Making Process

This section addresses the third research question of the study, “How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?” Inductive analysis revealed three significant power relationships in the decision-making process. The power relationships examined in this section include economic power relationships, legal/political power relationships, and social power relationships. These sections are outlined above in Table 3.

Economic Power Relations

Since one of the prevailing interests that influenced the production of television news at this station was the pursuit of profitability, it makes sense that economic power relationships help shape the decision-making process.

Because this is a commercial station in the United States, a capitalist society, the station is required to provide for its own financial support, and the station needs to look good financially to its parent company. As a publicly-held company, the parent has to work to maintain its financial value by attracting and retaining investors. If the station does not make a profit, the parent company suffers increasing the likelihood that the
stockholders will sell their shares, and the owners will be at a loss. Therefore, it behooves the owners to insure that the station management is performing, or the owners may fire management. Management works to insure the staff is performing on down the line.

To look good financially to the parent, the people at the station have to secure advertising to pay their bills and show profitability. As a result, advertisers have a particularly powerful role in the economic power relationship. Tessa says,

It’s something that people don’t realize. Is how many directions we are pulled in in a day, and who we’re trying to appease. I mean, [the staff] is trying to appease me. But I’m trying to appease the station manager. And he’s trying to appease the advertisers. So, I mean, they’re-- You’re right. It does go back to advertising.

Tessa explained further that by keeping and attracting viewers that they could sell more advertising and the station would be more profitable. The income may be used for things like improving their equipment which would enhance the look of the broadcast which would help attract and retain viewers. Holly described it as “a vicious cycle,” adding, “Even though we’re educating and everything, it is a business, and I am driven to make a paycheck, so I think that’s how that works.”

Though the participants realize they need the advertisers, they have to make calculated decisions about programming so that they do not appear to cater to the advertisers, but so that they do appear attractive as an outlet for advertiser dollars. Michelle discussed the kinds of things that Tessa has to consider when it comes to story selections that directly concern advertisers. She said Tessa might not approve a given story idea
if there is a conflict of interest here. Say you were doing a story on one of our local advertisers. We might not necessarily want to give them free advertising. Or at the same time it could be something that could deter them from advertising, that kind of line you have to walk closely.

Sometimes though, the news director has to give in to the power of the advertiser. Tessa said she sometimes does not have the control over which stories she uses if they deal with one of their sponsors. She told me that before she got into this business, she did not want to believe that there was a relationship between editorial and advertising, but now she knows there often is. For example, she told me about one of their sponsors who had two grand openings for one of the sponsor’s centers, and Tessa was directed by the station manager to cover, not one, but both of these openings in the newscast on separate days. She said it “happens a lot” and that it is “a fight in every newsroom” because no news director wants to put in stories just because they satisfy an advertiser.

The power relationship is negotiable, however. For example, this station includes a health segment in the broadcast every day. When I was collecting my data, they had recently secured an advertising contract with the area’s largest hospital, whom they had been trying to get as a sponsor for a long time. As part of the sponsorship, the hospital insisted that Tessa replace her network-produced health story with a locally-produced health segment every Friday. In the local segments, she was instructed that she had to use the advertising hospital and/or one of their doctors. Furthermore, she could not use a doctor from any other hospital to provide expertise in the local segment. Tessa said that the hospital staff had asked to review all the scripts for their health stories, but she “had to draw the line there” and would not allow it. She said that she was willing to take ideas
for consideration from them, but that they could not review her scripts. Because the hospital wanted to promote their breast cancer treatment facility, Tessa was asked to do one story a month about breast cancer. She agreed to these conditions.

The advertiser influence affected multiple facets of the programming, even those beyond the broadcast itself. For example, Tessa also showed me the station’s website which had a prominent online advertisement for the hospital. She called the ad “stupid” and “redundant” but said that stories in the broadcast would routinely refer viewers to the website during the locally-produced health segment because the hospital’s online ad had a link where viewers could request a packet of additional information from the hospital or connect to their website. The hospital wanted viewers to come to their own website for more information, and this was one way to drive that traffic. Tessa said the staff took the opportunity, whenever possible, to refer viewers to the station’s website for more information or links during the broadcast. She said the reason they did this was to expand the reach of the station and because they could bring in extra money from sponsors by selling this additional feature.

The power relationships do not always have the news staff fending off advances from advertisers who want editorial control; sometimes the staff will court advertisers so they can do the kind of programming they want. For example, on the day of my visit, I attended a meeting with the station manager, the advertising manager, the sports director, the sports reporter, the news director, and someone from production. The sports staff produces a separate weekly show during football season that focuses on local high school and college football. This show was the focus of the meeting, but the sports staff would also use some of the show’s reporting in the nightly newscast when appropriate. The
advertising manager’s main concern at the meeting was to find out what kind of coverage was planned (and desired) for the upcoming bowl games. Tessa explained that she was hoping they could find a sponsor who would pay for the sports staff’s trips to local bowl games. She said that would allow them to do a story every day from the bowl game, instead of doing it from the studio, making the broadcast more interesting for viewers and the reporting more interesting for her staff. She said they would make an announcement during the broadcast that the coverage was made possible by whoever the sponsor was. She said in a case like this it allows them to do “more and better coverage than they could do otherwise.”

In conclusion, the station’s existence in a capitalist society necessitates the pursuit of profitability. As a result of this structure, power relationships between the station and the advertisers comprise a careful balancing act. The station needs the money from the advertisers to operate, and for that reason, it wants to attract as many advertisers as possible and/or charge as much as it can, but at the same time it aims to retain as much control over editorial content decisions as can be negotiated. The advertisers want to maximize their returns on the dollar and will make as many demands on the programming as they can. The sides must work together to find a medium where everyone’s interests can be satisfied.

Legal/Governmental Power Relations

A second arena in which power relationships were significant was in those areas dealing with legal and governmental issues. The participants were tremendously interested in avoiding libel and slander lawsuits, but conversely they were able to negotiate their government-related power relationships more actively.
First, the staff is interested in avoiding the threat of lawsuits because a libel or slander lawsuit would directly affect the station’s credibility and could likely dissuade viewers from tuning in to learn about the day’s news. If the station appears to be unreliable or to provide incorrect reporting, they are at risk of losing not only the time, energy, and money fighting a lawsuit, but they also risk losing their sacred trust with the audience. As a result, even the potential threat of negative legal action can affect what and how the station covers news. In this example, Tessa makes things sound like she will cover most any story at most any time if it is worthy. She says,

I have definitely changed a lot in this station since I have been here. It’s been 7, 8 months. Our old news director, I don’t know if you want to use this, but she didn’t want to piss anybody off. There were stories that we would not do because it was going to piss somebody off. Well, that’s our job sometimes. You know, so, I have definitely changed the stories that they do. They do different stories now. They do a little harder stories, um, than we used to. Because I am not afraid. You know, that’s our jobs. And yes, we are the nice station, but there are times when, you know, you have to do your job, and sometimes your job pisses people off. But it has to be done. It’s part of our job.

Tessa continued, explaining that one of the main differences between her job as news director and the job of a reporter is that with her responsibility she is the one primarily responsible for making sure that the broadcast is not libelous or slanderous. She said,

The buck does stop with me. I don’t have somebody looking over my shoulder and saying, “Um, we’re going to get sued for this. Don’t do it.” That’s
my call now. You know. I have to deal with all that. I have to deal with all the crap. [The reporters] get to do their stories and go home.

The fear of being sued for reporting something incorrectly, however, runs deeper than Tessa indicates. Michelle explained she was aware of Tessa’s position that Tessa had to weigh the ramifications of the selection of each story she included or excluded in the broadcast, and she said that Tessa would not run stories that could cause a legal stir. Michelle said, “You know, if she just thinks it’s just something that we might get in legal trouble for doing, she won’t do that.”

The fear of libel lawsuits affects more than just the selection of stories. The reporters are aware that they do not simply “get to do their stories and go home.” Rather, the way they report their stories can also open them up for lawsuits. As a result, they are careful when they report anything negative about an individual or a company. Michelle told me about a story she reported where a local elderly widow had been the victim of shoddy workmanship from a contractor. She explained that she hesitated to name the contractor because she did not want to be sued. She said,

…and they didn’t do a very good job on the house. Well obviously, they know who they are, you know, who did it so they are not going to be happy that we’re talking about [them]. That’s why…I’m not going to mention the company’s name or their name, ‘cause we’re not in business of ruining people’s business or lives, so you have to be careful about that and anything you say people can sue you for if you are defaming them.

Michelle continued to tell me that sometimes when the station would report “a lot of bad news about the community” that they would sometimes get phone calls from people
asking why they covered things a certain way or why they were “smearing local people on TV.”

The concerns about reporting also extended to the stories that the participants took from other media also. Tessa said that when she was not able to check facts from those outlets herself, she always attributed them to the other media. This was, as stated earlier, because they wanted the audience to know the reporting came from another source in case it was wrong, but also because “you don’t want to get sued for libel or slander.”

Legal implications, however, are not the same as political implications related to the coverage of governmental issues, and in this arena, the participants acted more as agents of change and advocates for the consumer. Tessa explained that she believed that part of the job of the media was to be the “watchdog on government.” In this way, she said it was the responsibility of the media to expose governmental decisions that did not benefit the public. She told me about a story about a gas pipeline that the local government wanted installed. She said as the “watchdog” her job was

just to make sure they’re not doing anything wrong. We had a situation in [this city] that commissioners way back when had this grand idea about putting in a gas line up to Murphy, North Carolina, and selling gas to people along the line. … I, as a gas customer in [this city], am still paying for that line because they don’t have the customers. So, our job as a watchdog is to do that story, and say, “Hey [local] customers, you’re paying for this gas line, and they still don’t have customers. What are they doing to help you? Because it was their idea. None of us wanted it. You know, and we’re paying for it.” So that is watchdog, I mean more so…. It was a good story, but I am paying for it, you know.
As a media outlet, Tessa explained they also had the power to make quick changes in the government. She told me about a story that Holly was covering. Holly was going to interview the local county commissioners because the geography of the area had changed, and the maps showing the flood plains had not been updated. Tessa explained that Holly was just learning how to be a reporter. She went to the commissioners and showed them the maps, arguing that they were not correct. The commissioners told Holly that there was no story. Tessa described the conversation like this:

   I think it was about flood plains or something, and she was like, “And so we’re not really in the [flood] plains.” And I’m like, “The point is they haven’t updated these maps in 20 years, and all this is not what it says it is.” You know. And she’s like, “Well they’re gonna update them.” I am like, “Of course they are now, because you called them and said, ‘I am doing a story on your 20-year-old flood maps.’”

In conclusion, legal and governmental power relationships affect how news gets covered at this station. When the participants fear they may suffer from legal retaliation, they typically make more conservative decisions and avoid rankling the ire of any group or individual that can threaten the appearance of objectivity. Simultaneously, however, the participants consider themselves to be “watchdogs of the government,” and they can and often do affect governmental policies and positions by use of (or threatened use of) their power to inform voters.

*Social Power Relations*

The way the final broadcast appears is also influenced by social power relationships. These relationships include the way the station staff interacts with
individuals like the audience or story sources as well as other media outlets, but influence is also seen when the reporter exercises her own personal opinion in the story construction. Additionally, social relationships among the staff members also can influence the decisions that define the broadcast. These internal interactions are influenced by a strict hierarchy that affects processes as well as content.

**External social relationships.**

First, because the audience is the key to staying in business, the participants have to make sure the audience feels valuable. For example, Tessa says she always made an effort to appear nice when people call the station. She took a call from a viewer late in the day of my observation. While she was talking to the woman on the telephone, she rolled her eyes to show me that she thought the woman was kind of peculiar. However, she said she always made an effort to listen to people who called because sometimes they did have good story ideas or leads, and they were viewers of the program. During our later interview, she referred to the caller as “the crazy lady that called” but then she added,

Tessa: See, and that’s one of those things I shouldn’t have said. A lot of people call the station and tell us things. I call them crazy, not because they really are, but would you ever think to call a TV station? I wonder who really thinks that, you know, but they do, and a lot of times we’re very thankful.

Interviewer: Well, not only did she call a TV station, but she called you 15 minutes before you were going on the air, and talked to you for 10.

Tessa: Yeah. [Laughs].

Interviewer: And you let her!
Tessa: Yeah. I know, because you know, that’s another thing about being small. Is that I don’t want them to say I called up there, and that girl was mean to me. Because we have such a small community. Like all these communities are so small, and all the people talk. And we’re in their living room every day. Like we, we have to be nice to them. We have to treat them like family because we want them to invite us into their living room every night. [Robert] is not as good with them as I am. He’ll be like, “What do you want me to do? Alright, goodbye.” But I try so much to appease these people because I want them to count on us. I want them to know that we are their station. You know, so, I do deal with a lot more than I really have to. [Laughs.]

Interviewer: It sounds like it pays off sometimes.

Tessa: A lot of times it does, so that’s the trade off. There’s trade offs to everything in this business. That’s just one of them.

Second, the participants have to negotiate their relationships with sources for stories. The way they cultivate these relationships affects the way the story is told. Anita explains that by building positive relationships with sources, she is able to collect soundbites that give her the kind of story she wants to produce. She says,

I want these people to know me so they – I mean they’re telling these big things in their life, these things that they wouldn’t really share normally, and what, I’m supposed to go in and do like, stick a microphone in their face and expect them to give me something and then I can take it back? No, I mean, you have to talk to
them a little bit. I can tell them stuff about my life. Sometimes they care, sometimes they don’t care at all, and they just tell me whatever I need to know, but, you establish this bond with these people. … I have grown attached to a lot of those. A lot of the people I’ve interviewed. … One family in Banks County, their father was murdered last year, and at the time they didn’t know who killed him. Like this guy had no enemies. … And um, I just found some people, and they were the guy’s brothers. And they were like, well, we don’t want to talk on camera but his son should be coming sometime, and I talked to him, and he gave me great stories and pictures.

Third, the power relationships between competing media outlets affect how stories are covered. In general, media always want to have a breaking story first, and they aim to report as much as they can, as accurately as they can. As a result, the reporters will try to gather as much information as possible and then decide to share bits and pieces only if it serves them (perhaps by making them appear useful as a resource) and does not hurt their competitive advantage. Tessa said, “But if it’s here [in our viewing area], we don’t want [other stations] to have a one-up on us.” The tip call she received about the breaking murder story, came from a local newspaper. The reason the editor called her, she said, was because his paper did not cover Hall County, where the presumed shooting had taken place. She explained,

It’s a local paper, but Hall County is not his area. Habersham County is. So, if it was in Habersham County, he would have done the same thing I told you. He would have went out there and made sure he had everything for his paper and then called us. But since it was outside of his area then he just called us right
away. Then I called the radio station just for help, and I ended up giving them more information than they had, so there’s that toss-up about asking for help.

The original information Tessa received from the newspaper editor, however, was incomplete, and she needed more precise directions to the scene. She tried the police department to get more information, to no avail. She told me that she said she did not want to call other media outlets, especially in Atlanta, until after her station had a reporter on the scene to make sure that they got the story first. She said normally she does share stories with other media outlets, and she even has friends in Atlanta who she shares stories with, but she wants to do it “strategically” so they don’t get the story before she does.

Fourth, the beliefs of the participants also play a role in how material is presented. These beliefs may correspond with community beliefs. For example, on the day of my study, Michelle interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Lenny and Jackie Cannon, the couple who cooked a turkey dinner for some local special education students. In the broadcast supers that Michelle wrote, Mr. Cannon was identified as an “Azusa Ministries Pastor” while his wife was identified not with a position, but with a task, namely “Cooked Huge Dinner.” The soundbite Michelle selected for Mr. Cannon focused on his wife’s ability to cook. He said,

My wife is – You probably know she loves cooking, and she also has done missionary cooking. She was in Mexico a couple of months ago cooking for an orphanage there, and this is what she likes to do and has always liked doing.

Likewise, Mrs. Cannon’s soundbite focused on the work of the children who had come to help them. She said, “And the kids come, and they help, you know, put the food in the
boxes for us.” The story immediately cuts back to Mr. Cannon who adds, “And it’s been a blessing to our ministry, and um, we wanted to do something to show them that we appreciate their efforts.”

I asked Michelle why Mrs. Cannon was identified this way, and Michelle said she wanted “to be cute.” She said,

The reason I did that cause I mentioned that this is a husband and wife, and she wasn’t like, she was just kind of in charge of it. That’s one reason --. You just want to be cute with your, with your supers and just --. She is the one who cooks, I wanted to give her the --. Obviously she’s associated with Azusa, and he said it. And you know, she made mention of it too. People would know that they… You know I said the husband and wife of Azusa, so, and, you know, it’s like they [trails off].

By identifying Mr. Cannon as the organization’s leader, but identifying Mrs. Cannon only in her role as a supporter of the mission, the report showed Mrs. Cannon to be less powerful. Although Michelle did not explicitly state that she wanted to characterize Mrs. Cannon this way, Michelle’s explanation that she wanted “to be cute” shows that participants’ personal opinions can also affect the broadcast outcomes.

Internal social relationships.

Internal relationships among the participants affect who makes decisions about the execution of tasks related to broadcast production. In this case, a very strong hierarchal structure inside the news team influences processes as well as content.

The news director/producer holds most of the positional power in this relationship. Michelle explained, “Everything has to go through our news director,
[Tessa.] She approves every story that we do.” In fact, it is Tessa who selects the stories, organizes them and assigns them. Robert concurred, saying,

That’s [Tessa], yeah. And of course I offer input whenever I have any input, but that’s [Tessa]. That’s one of her many duties as news director is also being the assignment editor, which is a really hard job.

The news director’s positional power not only affects how things are done at the station, but what is covered in the stories. Tessa reviews every story that goes into the script for the 6 p.m. show, and she will also often review video while the reporting is developing the story in the editing bay. She also will review stories even after they run and provide feedback to reporters. In a memo to Holly, recapping Holly’s reporting in the Operation Christmas Child reporting, Tessa said,

Good job with the nats, but it would have been better if they were closer to the top [of the story]. Nats at the top of a package make people stop what they’re doing and look at the TV to see what the sound is. Good transition inside with the box. Nice framing through the boxes. Really good standup and nice transition into the ministry part.

The news director does share the power when she chooses to, however. In one case, during the planning meeting, the news staff was discussing doing a story about Black Friday, the big shopping day after Thanksgiving. This is a story they do every year. Tessa allowed the reporters to decide among themselves who would cover the assignment. Michelle said, “I did it last year. I don’t want to do it again.” Then the staff talked about some of the different angles the story has covered over the years. Anita said that sometimes they cover whatever the hot toy is for the year or they focus on how much
money is expected to be spent. She added, “I will go shopping if I have to,” and laughed.

Anita was assigned the story. Other times, the assignment decision is not debatable, like when Tessa assigned Michelle to cover the murder story.

The degree of influence each staff member has in relationship to Tessa varies. For example, when Tessa decided to pull Michelle off the anchor desk to cover the murder story, Michelle admits she was upset at first. She said,

Of course, at first I’m thinking, “My day only had 40 more minutes.” (Laughing)

Now I’ve added at least five hours to an already nine-hour day…and it was raining outside. It was very nasty, so of course your first thought is, “I really don’t want to do this.”

She says she reconsidered her original thought process later, saying,

But this is breaking news, hello. This is a murder. This is exciting stuff. So your first thought is, “Oh, my day is almost over!” But then your adrenaline just goes, [snaps] ‘cause this is what we live for. We live for breaking news stories like this.

Michelle never did voice any protest to Tessa when she was given the assignment.

However, often Robert is more opinionated, perhaps because he has more than 30 years of experience as a television news professional, and Tessa would often ask his advice about what she should do. He said,

She will often ask my opinion on which story I think would be better, but no, that’s [Tessa’s] decision. She decides what’s going to go in the show. If I feel strongly about something, I will lobby hard for it. But it’s her decision.

Tessa would not always take Robert’s advice when it was offered though. For example, Robert was adamant that sending Michelle to cover the murder story was a bad decision
even two days later when I interviewed him. In spite of the segment receiving some of the highest ratings in the program’s history, he would not admit that it should have been covered. He said,

   It was very cold, very windy, very wet, raining like crazy and to go to a place where [Michelle] didn’t know anything… We didn’t know what the story was. We had heard that there was a homicide. At that point it wasn’t even a homicide. We found out later. The guy did die later, which made it a homicide, but it was two guys that got into a fight, and one of them died. Well, that’s -- in my opinion, not big news.

In spite of having been overruled by Tessa on this decision, Robert argued that as the station’s main anchor, he still had plenty of power. I asked,

   Interviewer: Where, in your day, do you control what happens in the news broadcast?

   Robert: Oh, I don’t. Until I’m on the air. Then I can say whatever I want.

   Interviewer: In your role as anchor.

   Robert: Yeah. Right.

   Interviewer: But, is it not true that most of that is written ahead of time?

   Robert: All of it is.

   Interviewer: So how do you exercise your control?

   Robert: Oh, I don’t. But I have that option.

   Interviewer: I suppose that’s true. You can be a renegade one day.

   Robert: Yeah, sure. I mean, I could go out there and say the most outrageous things in the world if I wanted to, but I wouldn’t do that.
Interviewer: Why not?

Robert: It’s not something I would want to do.

Interviewer: Oh, I imagine it could jeopardize your job.

Robert: Oh, of course it could. And, I believe in telling the news as honestly and fairly and as openly as possible.

Interviewer: And do you believe that’s typically done by the script that’s developed? I mean --

Robert: It should be. That’s, that’s the goal.

Interviewer: Do you think that it’s done most of the time?

Robert: Ah, at this station?

Interviewer: Um, um.

Robert: Yes.

In fact, because all of Robert’s lines as anchor are scripted, he did not have a lot of power on the air. The way he was able to influence the script the most was when he would review what was written for him before the show aired, and he could make changes to what was said or when he wrote his own material. These stories and changes still were subject to Tessa’s approval, however.

In conclusion, social power relations can affect how stories are told on the local television news at this station. Some of those power relations are with outsiders. For example, the participants are careful that their interactions with the audience present them in a favorable light. Additionally, it behooves the participants to cultivate positive relationships with sources, because the sources can help or hinder the flow of information that becomes the crux of the story. Relationships with other media are carefully managed
to strategically direct the flow of information to maintain a competitive advantage when it serves the participants. Finally, the material gathered from interviews is often constructed to reflect personal opinions in a subtle way, often in agreement with community beliefs. Internal social relationships can also potentially influence broadcast decisions. Although the news director holds the majority of the power on the staff, she can share the power when she chooses, and she will entertain others’ opinions. In the final analysis, however, she is chiefly responsible for the program, and her influence can affect process as well as content.

**Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter outlines the process by which television news is produced, the interests that affect the broadcast and the power relations that influence the production. The participants engage in a routine of selecting the stories, organizing the stories, reporting the stories, writing and editing the stories, and then finally executing the live broadcast. The broadcast is influenced by certain interests including the pursuit of profitability – which includes making money as well as limiting spending. Additional interests include the reinforcement of prevailing cultural norms and values and the reinforcement of the rural narrative. This is all done as the broadcast maintains an appearance of objectivity. Finally, the power relations observed center primarily around three areas including economic issues, legal/governmental issues, and social issues where the participants negotiate a relationship with other stakeholders to try to accomplish their aims and goals.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

A majority of adults rely on the television news for information about the world, and they purport to believe a majority of what they see and hear (Pew Research Center, 2004). Viewers should consider, however, that the material presented in a day’s news broadcast is a small selection of the events that happen on a given day in a community, and what is contained in the broadcast may or may not represent the most meaningful, important information to a particular person. What becomes the news broadcast is created by human beings who have certain beliefs and practices operating within a certain environment that affects the way they do their work. This study examined the production of a local television newscast to better understand the role that interests and power relationships have on the production of that broadcast and the implicit values and cultural knowledge it contains. Following a summary of this case study, I discuss the study’s findings as related to the published research in related fields. Finally, I close this chapter with the implications of this work for future practice and research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how power relations and interests influence the decision-making process in the production of television news. The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast?

2. How do interests shape the decision-making process?
3. How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?

A qualitative case study design was used to address these questions. Data collection was conducted at a television station in the South that produced a commercial, on-air daily newscast. The station reached viewers over a 23-county viewing area and used local news as well as network programming in its broadcast. The majority of data was collected during an observation of the one-day news cycle on November 21, 2005 and during open-ended, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each member of the news staff over the next two days. Documentary data was also used. The study also included a one-day site pre-visit on October 3, 2005 and a pilot study on March 3, 2005 at a student-run station on the campus of a major research university in the South. The participants included the entire staff of the news team at the station. Specifically, there were five participants: the news director, the associate producer/anchor, and three reporters. The interviews were mostly focused on specific events and practices noted during the preceding day’s observation, with particular attention paid to those events that affected the material included in the day’s news broadcast. Data analysis consisted of use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to annotate, code, sort, and compile the data.

A number of findings were generated by this study. The first finding answered the research question: What is the decision-making process in the production of the broadcast? This finding was primarily a description of the five major steps in the production of the television news at this station. Those steps include 1) selecting the stories; 2) organizing the stories; 3) reporting; 4) writing/editing; and 5) broadcasting. Although all participants can influence each step, the producer is primarily responsible
for selecting and organizing. The reporter is primarily responsible for reporting and writing/editing, and everyone works on the broadcast.

The second finding answered the second research question: How do interests shape the decision-making process? Four interests were found to have an influence on the decision-making process during this broadcast: 1) pursuing profitability; 2) reinforcing prevailing cultural norms and values; 3) reinforcing the rural narrative; and 4) maintaining an appearance of objectivity.

The first interest, “pursuing profitability,” includes two parts: generating income by attracting and retaining an audience as well as curbing expenses by limiting resources. I found that the participants work to develop and maintain high ratings, and they take pride in their ability to attract and retain an audience. While the sales department is using the high ratings to sell more advertising (or sell it at a higher price) the participants have to work with deadline pressures and limited personnel, which keep costs down, thereby decreasing spending. The two prongs work together to maximize the station’s profitability.

The second interest was “reinforcing prevailing cultural norms and values.” By reflecting the values and opinions of the audience in an effort to identify with the greatest number of people possible, the broadcast reinforces the cultural norms and values held by the majority. The participants do this by catering to the perceived desires of the majority of their audience. The broadcast at this station reflected the mostly older, white, Christian, conservative, rural makeup of the audience. The participants claimed to have a commitment to changing stereotypes, but did not point to any specific examples. Rather, the broadcast included overt Christian messages in both of the locally produced stories on
the day of my observation, and the station’s one black reporter said she experienced racial discrimination while she was working (though she did not report it as such).

The third interest was “reinforcing the rural narrative.” The participants espoused a strong anti-urban, particularly anti-Atlanta, mindset. This characterization of themselves and their reporting as “good news” allowed them to limit critical thought, frame debate, and homogenize reporting. When “bad news” was presented, it was done in a non-threatening way, making it seem insignificant, or it was collected from other media sources that were accessible to other news directors and producers which helps dilute its impact.

The fourth interest was “maintaining an appearance of objectivity.” All the while the participants are giving the audience what they think they want, the participants are espousing a position of objectivity. The appearance of objectivity helps reinforce their reputation as a balanced, credible source of information, which keeps the audience tuned in. In practice, however, diversity is often missing from the stories that are reported.

The third finding of the study answered the research question, “How do power relationships shape the decision-making process?” The power relations examined were focused primarily in three areas: 1) economic; 2) legal/governmental; and 3) social. The economic power relationships showed that while advertisers did sometimes influence the content of the broadcast, other times they were sought after because their financial backing allowed the participants to develop the kind of stories they wanted to do. The legal/governmental power relationships showed that while the participants would sometimes curb their reporting for fear of being sued for libel or slander, other times they considered themselves agents of social change, particularly in their role as “watchdogs.”
of the government. The social power relationships included external social relationships that insisted that the participants treat the audience and story sources as potential customers at all times, that information sharing with other media be done strategically, and that the beliefs of the participants can affect the final story. Additionally, internal social relationships are governed by a very strong hierarchal structure governed by the news director, and she controls when and with whom she shares her power.

Conclusions and Discussion

Three conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, hegemony influences the decision-making process. Second, power relationships and interests frame people’s decision making in the production of television news content. Third, television news selectively defines the educational needs of its audience.

*Hegemony influences the decision-making process*

This study has shown that mainstream cultural norms and values are reinforced in the television news broadcast. By way of the calculated construction of the broadcast by the news team, the viewer is presented with a picture of their community that is widely accepted by the mostly older, white, Christian, conservative and rural audience base in this area. The stories that comprise the public record of the day’s major happenings are about how these community members interface with their community. Viewers are presented with a slice of local life that reflects the cultural beliefs commonly held by those who control and finance their existence, directly or indirectly. This reflection helps perpetuate the existing ideologies held by the majority and provides a lens through which the media can selectively organize the audience’s attention.
The means by which this happens is hegemony. Gramsci (1971) described hegemony as process by which dominant groups work to maintain their power and protect their common interests, not through force, but through the apparent willingness of subordinate classes who accept the cultural tenets and definitions reinforced by the status quo. Gitlin (1979) notes that this process does not occur independently of everyday life. He says,

Commercial culture does not manufacture ideology; it relays and reproduces and processes and packages and focuses ideology that is constantly arising both from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout society (as well as within media organizations and practices) (p. 253, italics in original).

The findings of this study confirm the existence of a hegemonic influence in the television news. Altheide (1985), Bagdikian (2000), and Hall (1980, 1982) have shown that the broadcast’s construction is not accidental. Rather, everything that appears in the final product is recorded, viewed, edited, scripted, reviewed, and approved by multiple participants to create a picture of the important local events of the day. This study showed that construction of the broadcast is managed through five steps including the selection of the stories, organizing the stories, reporting of the stories, writing and editing the stories, and the broadcast itself. This process confirms Jarvis’s (1985) idea that before information is presented to a recipient, it has to be processed by others and that this processing is a “unique and individual act but only within the context of social living” (p. 11). Herman and Chomsky (2002) postulate that, in this way, hegemonic control is infused “through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering
of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises” (p. 298).

Whether by giving prominence to stories with a Christian emphasis, failing to identify the special education status of local schoolchildren, identifying the pastor’s wife only as the one who “cooked huge dinner,” or by identifying and reinforcing the broadcasters and their broadcast as “the good news station” the program is able to perpetuate the community’s identity as a wholesome, conservative, rural place, and particularly as a place that is different from its neighbor, Atlanta. By “othering” the broadcasts and concerns or viewpoints that may not resonate with the audience, the news staff is able to frame the debate, in the same way that Herman and Chomsky (2002) described the use of “anticommunism” as a control mechanism that “helps mobilize the populace against an enemy” (p. 29).

Further, by positioning the news broadcast as an objective source of information, the participants are able to minimize “flak,” which is the negative response to a media statement or program (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). At this station, package stories were typically presented with at least two primary spokespersons, often who were different enough to give the appearance that they represented diverse viewpoints about the story, even if they did not actually espouse divergent views. The young boy and the older man who were the spokespersons for the Operation Christmas Child story are one example. The authors note that flak is not only uncomfortable for stations to endure, but it can also be costly since positions have to be defended in the organization and sometimes outside of it, possibly before legislatures or courts. Tessa and Michelle both mentioned concerns about being able to check facts they reported in the broadcast or attributing their reporting
to other media if they could not check the facts so they would not be blamed in case of an error. Even the erosion of public opinion that the station is a reliable source of information can cause negative repercussions by a reduction in the market share and therefore in advertising revenue.

In concert with hegemony’s negotiable influence, television news does not affect one-sided change. The process is constantly entertaining oppositional points of view. Gitlin (1979) notes that “hegemonic ideology is systematically preferred by certain features of TV programs, and that at the same time alternative and oppositional values are brought into the cultural system, and domesticated into hegemonic forms at times, by the routine workings of the market” (p. 254). This explains the findings of this study that highly-rated murder stories could be featured prominently in the evening broadcast while the station was still maintaining an identity as “the good news station” and that the reporters can cover stories that report negatively on the local government so long as it appears they are acting in the public interest as “watchdogs” and affecting popular change.

A hegemonic influence “is normally not accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors’ and working journalists’ internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution’s policy” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. xi). This study showed this broadcast to be no exception, as even the station’s personnel assumed the norms and tenets espoused in their stories. For example, Anita, the sole African American employed by the station, did not recognize the racism she experienced, as shown in the findings, and this myopia allowed her to construct her stories with a vision of the community that fits with
the way the majority identify themselves. She discounted the reaction she received from
the local people she encountered, saying “I haven’t had any bad experiences at all,” even
after recounting how someone would not shake her hand because she was black and how
other people in the community noted to her that she was “not from around here.” This
kind of thinking is rewarded in the newsroom because it allows the reporter to create a
story that resonates with the beliefs and values of the community in general.

*Power relationships and interests frame people’s decision making in the production of
television news content*

Cervero and Wilson’s (1994, 2006) model has traditionally been applied to formal
educational programs in settings like educational institutions, nonprofit organizations,
community based organizations, and even corporate training programs. Some examples
include the following: Mills, Cervero, Langone, and Wilson (1995) used the model to
study the dynamics of planning in a state’s cooperative extension service; Maclean
(1997) used the model to explain the planning of educational programs in a continuing
education setting; Hendricks (1996) examined power and interests in a nursing education
program, and Carter (1996) used it to look at empowerment planning in a health
promotion coalition. Kleiber (1996) examined curriculum development within an
independent study distance education program at a university.

Until this study, however, the Cervero and Wilson framework has never been
used to examine the production of a television program as an example of educational
program development. The Cervero and Wilson model does serve as a useful framework
for understanding the planning of a television news program, however, because viewers
do learn from the television news and the production of the program is similar to the
production of more traditional educational programs, particularly in the adherence to interests and the negotiation of power relationships to bring about the program’s existence.

This research demonstrates that, like previous studies using the framework in traditional education settings, power relationships can and do affect program outcome. Maclean (1997) showed that planning is a social activity guided by a process of negotiating interests. In the planning process, different levels of power exist in relationship to different audiences. Likewise, this work shows that the same principle applies in a news station, but for the first time the impact on a commercial entity in a capitalist system is examined using the framework. Simply said, the participants have to make sure they produce a series that will attract and retain an audience (and therefore advertisers). Without the income generated by their program, they will cease to exist.

By assuming a reliance on advertisers, and therefore on an audience, the decisions about what appears on the television news and how it gets there is a social activity. Previous research by Archie-Booker, Cervero, and Langone (1999) about the effectiveness of AIDS prevention programs showed that messages had to be culturally relevant to be meaningful to the consumers, and the same is true in this study. As a social construction, the “planning table” is necessarily infused with power relations, and planners need to recognize whose interests are at stake. Herman and Chomsky (2002) note that as media compete for the patronage of advertisers, the advertisers therefore affect the welfare of the media “whose requirements and demands the media must accommodate if they are to succeed” (p. 16). The participants realize they need the advertisers to pay their expenses and bills, so they develop programming to attract and
retain the audience, and this can lead to programming that serves the needs of advertisers, rather than the needs of the viewers. This study found that this was the case, as the participants were consumed by maintaining high ratings in order to attract and retain an audience, as well as Tessa’s comments that she believed it was the job of the news media to “reflect” the environment in which they operated.

Power relationships are rarely symmetrical. Drennon and Cervero (2002) showed that as facilitators negotiate power relationships to achieve their aims, they also act on power relationships that either reproduce or transform them. This was evident in both the internal and external relationships of the participants in the study. For example, while Tessa explained that she felt an obligation to be nice to every viewer who called the station with a news tip, her friendliness came with the motive to attract and retain that caller as a viewer. Likewise, Anita explained that she is often amiable toward her sources because it helps her to gather richer interviews and therefore do a better job reporting her stories. Last, Tessa explained that while sometimes she would rely on other media for stories, as she did in the development of the copy stories in the rundown each day or as she did for the news tip about the breaking murder story, her choice to share the same kind of information with other media outlets was made very strategically, and the exercise of her power would change the relationships with the other media outlets with whom she was communicating – as well as possibly change their broadcast.

*Television news selectively defines the educational needs of its audience*

The television news claims to be an objective source of information about the world, and most people believe what they see and hear on the news (Pew Research Center, 2004). For most people there is no way besides the mass media to find out about
the many things happening in the world on a given day. It would be impossible to see wildfires in California, genocide in Sudan, the winning play by the Chicago Cubs, and governmental policy decisions on Capitol Hill all in less than 24 hours if you had to visit each place in person to gather first-hand information. As a result of modern technology, we have television news to provide us with information about such happenings. Guy (2006) notes that “because they are so pervasive, these global communications networks of the mass media in effect become systems of informal adult education” (p. 96). But how useful is this information?

Brookfield (1986) says the media “reflect rather than create the values and perceptions of the dominant culture” (p. 158). He says the media use their production processes to “frame the context within which ‘important,’ ‘relevant,’ and ‘newsworthy’ issues are identified, they provide selected information on those issues, and they present apparently ‘objective’ versions of news events pertaining to those issues” (p. 158). This study reinforces Brookfield’s point. Tessa made decisions throughout the day about which stories would be included and excluded, as well as which order they would appear. Even the reporters were able to influence the amount and type of information included in a story through their reporting and editing.

By their reflection, the media limit debate by showing us only a small piece of the world. As a result, a viewer is presented with parts of a story and is left to draw conclusions about the happening or even the state of the world based on what they see and hear in a very short time and based on his or her personal experiences and worldview. Brookfield (1986) says that “the media play a crucial role in framing our views of the world and the context within which we decide which issues and problems
are significant in the political realm” (p. 151). An average news broadcast contains approximately 30 stories about the area upon which it is reporting, but as this study showed, it is impossible in a minute-and-a-half package story or less, in the case of other types of stories, to show every perspective on a given topic. Additionally, the reporters are given limited time and resources while they are challenged to make their reporting complete, informative, entertaining, fresh and relevant to a mass audience – an impossible task.

The real question is who benefits from this kind of presentation? It is clear that many stories are not told each day, and the participants in the newsroom are the ones who decide which stories are told and which are not. A tension exists between whose stories the media “reflect” and whose stories are not told. Jarvis (1985) notes that “those who dominate in society will also tend to dominate in the production and transmission of information” (p. 13) and that “the culture of a society is oriented in a specific direction and that interpretation of social phenomena are in accordance with the meaning given by the elite” (p. 13). As this study showed, the selection and presentation of certain stories in a certain order selectively organizes the viewers’ attention with an authorized version of reality. But it is only one version of reality. When the information selected to portray the most important, relevant happenings of the day in the local community include a soundbite of a man praying over a meal or when the top “bad” news of the day does not even occur in the local community – as was the case with the story about the layoffs at the General Motors plant that was actually outside the station’s viewing area – a message is delivered to the audience saying that “We are a secure, Christian place to be.” This may or may not be the reality for any given viewer, but by reinforcing the generally
accepted cultural narratives, viewers do not entertain alternatives. Generally, this
perspective would be a disservice to anyone outside of the majority demographics of the
viewing area.

The greatest challenge of mass media is that they cater to the masses. They
require larger and larger numbers of people to consume their product in order to be
profitable in our capitalistic economy. As our society is increasingly diverse, this model
will not serve the needs of growing numbers of individuals. Guy (2006) notes that
“although adult educators play a central role in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of
educational programs, this role is being eroded by the effect of the mass media” (p. 113).
It would behoove adult educators to begin considering the mass media as a means of
education in itself and, as Brookfield (1986, 1987) and Graham (1989) recommend, to
develop programs to help their students to be more critical of the media they consume.

Implications for Research and Practice

There are some practice implications that can be developed out of the findings of
this research project. First, it is anticipated that these findings will help provide media
literacy educators in the fields of speech communication, mass communication, and adult
literacy with a more complete understanding of media literacy and practice so they can
better illustrate how the implicit and explicit messages from television news make their
way into our popular culture.

Second, this work can provide a critical understanding of the dynamics that
contribute to media program development. As Ytreberg (2000) notes, compared to the
number of studies that combine a focus on the text with studies of reception processes,
the number of studies that focus on text production “are rather few” (p. 53). This study
can add to the scientific literature base by providing an insider’s perspective on what really happens in the course of a news cycle and the resulting production of the broadcast. This work could be expanded by providing a more detailed study of individual aspects of television news production and assessing their affect on a broadcast. For example, a future study might focus exclusively on the source of the stories that appear in the broadcast. By looking more closely at the origination of a broadcast’s stories, scientists and media educators might better understand why certain stories are excluded while others are included. With this information, they may be able to influence whose stories are told on the news, or they could better equip their students to view the selection of stories from a critical perspective.

Third, this work extends our understanding of Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) framework by explicitly outlining the power relationships and interests of the stakeholders in local television news production. Until this point, there has been no study of the application of this model to mass media. We know that consumers of television news learn things through their consumption and that television news can be treated as an educational program. By applying the Cervero and Wilson (2006) framework, we are able to extend our understanding of the model to programs that rely exclusively and overtly on commercialism for their existence. Future studies may be able to find other commercial venues into which the model can be applied.

Finally, this research gives adult educators greater insight into how and why media texts are developed and can inform the basis for future scholarship in areas like media literacy, education, media studies, production studies, journalism, mass communication and business. Future studies may more closely examine newspapers,
radio or Internet news, blogs, web portals, or other media to deconstruct the relationship between culture and meaning. This might be done, for example, by looking closely at how the use of certain language highlights the social underpinnings of culture or how a particular media product creates an identity for certain groups in society. Additionally, scholars may want to see how certain meanings uncovered in the media help organize and regulate cultural practices, officially or unofficially. One previously cited example of this kind of study is Acosta-Alzuru (2003).

The results of this research project also point to additional research beyond the scope of this project. One direction would be to see how these research results compare to research results from a similar study done at a larger station to see if a greater diversification among a larger staff provides for more diversification in the power relations and interests during the production of the broadcast. Additionally, a researcher might look for greater diversity in the types of stories covered or in their subjects. If this study was replicated at a station in one of the top 20 media markets, as opposed to a rural market, it would be interesting to see whether the same kinds of interests and power relationships prevail, and to what degree, if any. Second, it would be interesting to see how the results would compare at another station owned by a different company but affiliated with the same network. This way, it might be possible to determine how much the power relations and interests are influenced by the offerings from the network compared to the work of the individuals in a particular newsroom who work locally to produce stories. The aforementioned study may further demonstrate Guy’s (2006) and Herman and Chomsky’s (2002) arguments that consolidation of resources leads to the homogenization of media messages. Third, a study may be conducted comparing the
results from this study to the production of other news media. This might include a similar study done in the newsroom of a newspaper or a radio station with a news format, for example, to see if the power relations and interests are consistent across various media types. Last, a follow-up study may be done to examine the spectrum of media analysis from production to textual analysis to consumption. After an understanding of the production is developed, questions could be asked of consumers about what kind of information they seek from the news; what kind of characteristics they like in the broadcast, or the on-air staff, or the reporting, etc.; and how they use the information they receive. This scientific data would help show whether the power relations and interests that were determined to influence the broadcast in this study actually have the impact on audience attraction and retention that the study participants indicate.

A Concluding Note

The television news is not a neutral glimpse of an objective moment in time on any given day. What becomes the public record of the day’s noteworthy events is selected, organized, reported, written, edited, and broadcast by human beings working to attract and retain the largest audience possible by reflecting and reinforcing the culture in which they exist. As a human endeavor, however, the production of television news has the capacity to be used as an instrument of enlightenment and education. We should realize this and capitalize on it by helping consumers of mass media to be critical thinkers and users of the tools of our times. Murrow (1958) said,

I am frightened by the imbalance, the constant striving to reach the largest possible audience for everything; by the absence of a sustained study of the state of the nation. … We are currently wealthy, fat, comfortable, and complacent. We
have currently a built-in allergy to unpleasant or disturbing information. Our mass media reflect this. But unless we get up off our fat surpluses and recognize that television in the main is being used to distract, delude, amuse, and insulate us, then television and those who finance it, those who look at it, and those who work at it, may see a totally different picture too late.
REFERENCES

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*Journal of Communications, 33*, 279-301.


Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Walk me through your day on [date].
   - What was your job[s]?
   - On which stories did you work?

2. Tell me about the responsibilities or interests of [job]?
   - How did those responsibilities affect how stories were selected on [date]?
   - How did those responsibilities affect how the broadcast was organized on [date]?
   - Tell me about how you affected the telling of the stories on [date], including the use of sources if relevant.
   - How did you use the tools of the television business (camera, PR people, etc.) to do your job on [date]?

3. How did you work with others to carry out the [job]?
   - How did others on the staff affect your decisions about which stories were used on [date]?
   - How did others on the staff affect how the broadcast was organized on [date]?
   - Who are some of the people, internal and external, that affected the telling of the stories on which you worked on [date]?
   - Are there any people who helped or hindered you with your job on [date]?

4. Are there any other ways you affected the broadcast on [date]?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Story Slug</th>
<th>Talent</th>
<th>format</th>
<th>Tape</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Backtime</th>
<th>Appr</th>
<th>Writer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>PRESHOW/GM CLOS</td>
<td>VO/WIPE</td>
<td>TZ</td>
<td>0:00</td>
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<td>6:00:00</td>
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<td>VO/COPY</td>
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<td>COPY/PK</td>
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<td>AC STUDENT DIES</td>
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<td>0:20</td>
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<td>6:02:39</td>
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<td>6:02:59</td>
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<td>COPY/PK</td>
<td>05-125</td>
<td>2:17</td>
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<td>6:05:48</td>
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<td>COPY</td>
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<td>COPY/PK</td>
<td>05-123</td>
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<td>A62</td>
<td>XMAS CHILD</td>
<td>FS</td>
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<td>A70</td>
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<td>COPY/VO tse</td>
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<td>UGA GETS GRANT</td>
<td>COPY/VO tse</td>
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