

STATEHOUSE REPORTERS AND THEIR USE OF SOURCES

by

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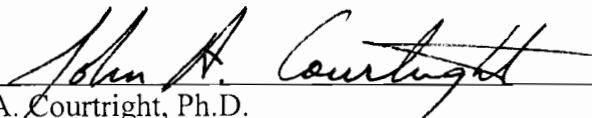
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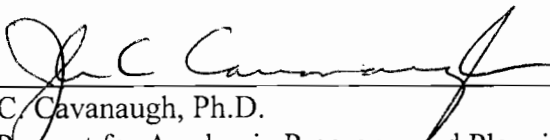
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between statehouse reporters and the sources they use in their newspaper articles. Using quantitative methods, this study attempts to answer the research question that reporters' personal characteristics and political orientation may influence whom they select as sources of information. Twenty-eight reporters were interviewed and surveyed about their use of sources and other issues. A content analysis was conducted using 30 articles from each reporter for a total article sample of 864. Multiple regression, t-tests, and nonparametric procedures were conducted using the content analysis data and information from reporters. No significant relationships were found between reporters' personal characteristics and political orientation and their source usage. However, reporters were found to use sources that supported the status quo, specifically the political party in power in each of four states where reporters in this sample worked. Statehouse reporters also were found to be more content in their jobs than the average U.S. reporter.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Ask what the measure of a reporter is, and the answer will be, "She's only as good as her sources." Ask a reporter to reveal his sources, and the answer will be a quick and resounding "No." For a profession that prides itself on objectively reporting the facts, these statements seem to point beyond the facts to a strong relationship between a reporter and his or her sources.

While much has been written about the effects of training and news routines on how journalists go about their jobs, journalists still manage to turn out often markedly different stories when sent to cover the same town meeting. While some differences may stem from editorial processes or the impact of the news organization, another factor is reporters' source selections. "Reporters are judged professionally by the sources they keep," Schudson wrote in the introduction to his 1995 book, The Power of News (p. 91). After a source makes the first cut of being interviewed, the source must advance further, beyond the final cut (and stay off the cutting room floor, so to speak) to be included in the published article.

Journalists tend to cultivate a stable of preferred sources who get interviewed frequently and often make this final cut. A variety of factors shape the constitution of this preferred source listing, including the status/prestige of the source, perceived expertise and articulateness of

the source, and the past reliability of the source. An additional concern is how the reporter's own world view (or political orientation) affects the source selection.

This study put reporters under the microscope to examine their decision-making processes and activities in selecting and using sources in newspaper articles concerning state government in four Eastern U.S. states. Data from interviews with reporters about how they do their job, as well as surveys about their interests, political orientations, and points of view, will be compared with a content analysis regarding the use of sources in articles written by these same reporters.

While most media studies of news sources use the organizational or professional levels of analysis, this study looks at sources from the level of analysis of the individual reporter. In addition, this study tries to make the link between the characteristics of the reporter and the sources chosen in news stories.

Earlier research using the participant-observer approach has brought us important and revealing accounts of how reporters operate in the newsroom and even sometimes at the scene of action (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1973). Other research has analyzed newspaper articles and television broadcasts to determine patterns of source usage by certain media organizations or the journalistic profession as a whole (LaSorsa & Reese, 1990; Reese, Grant & Danielian, 1994). This study goes a step further in tying reporters' own statements about themselves and how and why they do their job to the final product they produce for public consumption.

This study tests the theory that reporters' characteristics, orientations, and experiences will lead them to prefer certain sources over others. As a result, each reporter will develop a repertoire of favored sources, as evidenced by more frequent appearances of these sources in articles written by these reporters. A reporter's selection will be based, at least partially, on a variation between reporters, which in some cases represents that reporter's personal preferences.

Significance to News Production Research

Earlier studies using the participant-observer method provided groundbreaking evidence of the processes at work in previously uncharted newsrooms. Now more quantitative analysis of the impact of these processes on the printed word is needed. By combining reporters' observations about themselves with their use of sources in published articles, this study can offer insight into the influence of the individual reporter.

Journalism is often thought of as a product of reporters racing to beat deadlines -- and competition between news organizations. But media products consist of myriad forces, including the actions of thousands of individual reporters who put their individual marks on news stories every day. One view of this scenario is that the individual effects produced by each reporter will be balanced by the effects produced by other reporters, especially at competing news organizations (Tuchman, 1973). Yet with the sharp decline in the number of newspapers nationwide, this reliance on achieving balance through competition will not work in a growing number of U.S. cities. We can no longer skip over the reporter as an individual actor as we seek to understand the product of news and to assess its impact. This

study starts where news stories begin: with the individual reporter on his or her beat, which in the case of this study is the statehouse.

Even as far back as colonial times, journalism played an important role in keeping citizens informed and knowledgeable. Since that time, alleged media bias and its effects have been a longstanding concern. Most often this issue is tackled by researchers studying newspapers as a profession or as separate organizations. This study will provide a new look at bias in newspaper reporting as it tackles effects produced by individual reporters. While this study may provide insights into differences resulting from reporters' personal orientations, we also may find differences due to formal education (or the lack thereof) in journalism programs and on-the-job training (both variables that can be changed in the future by the practitioners themselves).

One of the key principles operating in journalism today is the "Ideology of Objectivity." Reporters profess a dedication to fair, accurate, and balanced reporting, which, they would add, amounts to objective reporting. Although objective reporting remains difficult to define, reporters rely on an operational definition of sorts, which allows them to fall back on routine procedures as a defense of their objectivity. If these procedures are followed, the argument goes, a reporter can carry out objective newsgathering. While previous research has shown certain biases inherent in the objectivity practices themselves (Tuchman, 1973), this study attempts to pierce those routines to see how reporters vary in their practice of journalism and to see how this results in different patterns of source usage in published articles. A preference for particular sources may be correlated with a reporter's

personal characteristics and orientations, which would amount to individual effects produced by each reporter.

Any individual effects produced by individual reporters also may be seen as a form of influence--or bias--in the news. If reporters prefer to use different sources when covering similar stories, the results would show a difference or bias. In addition, a pattern of such continued use may be viewed as a consistent bias in a certain direction. While that direction could be political (conservative or liberal), it also could be in favor of the status quo, or in favor of a specific issue or organization, for instance.

Theoretical Framework

Before looking at how individual reporters may stray from the notion of objective newsgathering, it is important to probe the concept of objectivity itself and to understand the multiple level of forces operating to create the environment in which individual reporters work.

An analysis of the ideal of objectivity must include its origins, functions, and value in modern journalism. While "objective" or "straight" news reporting is considered standard today, it hasn't always been de rigeur. The first American publishers produced partisan newspapers. They eventually gave way to more unbiased versions when advertising seeking a broad audience was introduced along with the start-up of news wire organizations that served many individual newspapers.

Yet the ideology of objectivity is used for more than "keeping journalists honest," as some would say; it operates to maintain the level of privilege, legitimacy, and credibility

that the profession has built up in this century. By claiming objectivity for their banner, journalists could elevate themselves from their "trade" status to that of a profession.

Many practices were generated to support the notion of objectivity among journalists. For instance, Tuchman recounts a reporter's search for a quotation from a source that would portray the reporter's own view of a news story. However, news routines and conventions allow that information attributed to a source other than the reporter is to be considered objective.

Bias in the news is not necessarily the result of conscious efforts by journalists; the practices have become so well accepted that Tuchman calls them "strategic rituals" (1972). Another convention is the reliance on officials as authoritative sources. For instance, when covering a protest demonstration, reporters seek out official sources, such as police and representatives of the institution under protest, for comment and often ignore the issues that led to the protest (McLeod & Hertog, 1992).

Despite the professional emphasis on objectivity, much of the research literature to date reveals certain structural and even intentional biases that may enter into news reporting. Research on news production has often focused on identifying the origin of biases in news coverage. The sources of these biases can be located using a variety of levels of analysis from the micro-individual level to the macro-socio-cultural level. Ultimately, this study investigates the individual level sources of influence over news production. But a thorough understanding of the other influences at work is important for conceptualizing the environment in which reporters operate.

Objectivity and Bias

While the media strive on a daily basis to weed out the influence of bias and achieve objectivity, these terms are rarely defined. Bias and objectivity can be seen as antonyms, although that does not really assist the explanation. Schudson seems tired of the endless definitions that describe what being objective is not when he straightforwardly states: "Yet the belief in objectivity is just this: the belief that one can and should separate facts from values" (1978, p. 5). Some consider objective reporting to be "valueless" and Schudson agrees that the use of values would constitute bias in newswriting (1978).

Operational Definition. For some, objectivity is more an operational practice than a concept that can be defined. Tuchman (1978) chose to isolate the regular practices reporters follow, which they claim keeps them objective in their newswriting. She narrows these processes down to five that make up an operational definition of objectivity: (1) showing conflict; (2) showing supporting evidence; (3) use of quotation marks; (4) structuring a story with the most important items first, usually in the style of the inverted pyramid, and; (5) using labels, such as "news analysis" as a method of distinguishing between articles with opinion and those without it.

Professional Bias. Even if the above rituals are followed faithfully, the ensuing results may miss the mark of objectivity. Appending his definition of objectivity, Schudson (1995) finds four types of "professional bias" in the news media. They are: (1) the proclivity for "negative" news; (2) reporters' efforts to remain "detached" from their stories;

(3) the reliance on "technical" information (such as poll results and insider political maneuvering rather than the discussion of issues), and; (4) the use of official sources for corroboration or verification of information.

Identifying Sources of Influence on News Production

As can clearly be seen, Tuchman and Schudson concentrate on bias and objectivity on the professional level, which leaves a clear opening for research into bias and objectivity on the individual/reporter level. Professional influences on reporters are but one of six levels or types of influences that can affect reporters. These influences are:

Socio-cultural, including the country's ideology, language, resources, economic system, among other items;

Organizational, including the size of the news organization, the size and demographics of its market and audience, the ownership, style of management, organizational mission, and conventions of that organization;

Medium, including modes of conveyance, such as print, photography-only, video or film, and audio-only; technology, newsgathering techniques, and conventions of each medium;

Professional, including codes and conventions, training, journalistic mission, among others; and

Individual, consisting of education, life experience, journalistic experience, years on the beat, personal political beliefs, socio-economic background, and specific job. (The impact of each of these factors will be examined in this study.)

Reality, perhaps the most difficult level to define, is much debated by scholars. McKinzie (1994) argues that reality consists of agreements determined to allow everyday living. Regarding the news, Sigal (1973) suggests that news provides a sampling of reality sifted through the perspectives of the news gatherers themselves.

Each level is characterized by a perspective on its place in the world, sometimes termed "world view," and each level also carries a set of codes and conventions that have developed as routine practices and beliefs followed at that level. For instance, on the organizational level, members of one news organization would hesitate or refuse to share information with members of a competing organization based on the convention of competition in journalism. The competition convention is a belief that readers or viewers will be more attracted to one news organization's product if it consistently breaks news stories ahead of other news organizations. A similar convention would be found on the individual level where reporters judge other reporters' abilities based on who "scoops" whom more often.

A few examples of bias at the individual reporter level have been noted in the literature. One newspaper transferred an education reporter to the copy desk due to her political activism in a gay rights group (Stein, 1993). And former Wall Street Journal business reporter A. Kent MacDougall shocked the journalistic community in 1988 when he declared that he had been a radical socialist during his 10 years at that paper (Reese, 1990).

Of course, the final level of analysis is reality itself. Unfortunately, what can be agreed upon as our external reality is actually quite small, according to Walter Lippmann

(1922). "Wherever there's a good machinery of record, the modern news service works with great precision," Lippmann wrote, referring to voting in elections or scores in sports games (1922, p.38). But the rest of the time, "The newspaper occupies the position of the umpire in the unscored baseball game."

Individual Influences and Source Selection

There are many individual level factors that may affect the individual reporter's article construction, such as education, job experience, and personal political orientation. These factors may influence story construction but only within the confines of the socio-cultural environment, the rule, routines, and practices of the organization, the codes and conventions of the profession, and the requisites of the particular medium. The influence of individual biases can influence a variety of elements of news construction, including story topic, choice of words, and the selection of whom to interview as sources of information. This study focuses specifically on reporters' use of sources and attempts to examine what influence individual differences between reporters has on source selection.

The Reporter-Source Relationship. When Herbert Gans talks about the reporter-source relationship in his book, "Deciding What's News" (1979), he characterizes the relationship as one in which the source seeks out or solicits the reporter in an effort to get certain information published in the newspaper. While this is an important aspect to the process of information production, the flip side of this picture is equally important. And that is, how do reporters seek out or solicit sources to be interviewed for articles? The focus of this current study zeroes in on this process by seeking to understand how reporters'

individual characteristics and orientations affect or correlate with the people they choose more often for sources.

From whichever direction one chooses to look at the reporter-source relationship, the process is one of gatekeeping. While a source may serve as a gatekeeper in deciding which material to reveal and which to withhold, the reporter, upon receiving information from a source, then makes a big decision of what to do with it: Publish? Verify? Seek further comment elsewhere? And so on. While gatekeeping is most often thought of in the sense of newspapers (editors and publishers particularly acting in the organizational level) deciding which news elements to let pass through the gate to the reading public (Shoemaker, 1991), the reporter actually is the first media representative at the gate. Shoemaker does pay heed to the effects of individuals in the organization as well. "The gatekeeper's personal opinion may also influence the selection of arguments in news stories and editorials" (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 26).

Individual Influences on the Reporter-Source Relationship. Throughout interpersonal communication scholarship, it is clear that similarities between people aid the attraction process in building a relationship, whether it takes place on-the-job, in school, or in a social setting. Less apparent than a routine and less concrete than similarities such as age, hometown, or collegiate ties are what Gans identified as shared values (1979). Gans staked out newsrooms at two national weekly news magazines and two TV networks' news stations over several years and determined that values shared among journalists have a great effect on the process of what becomes news, who contributes to that process as a source,

and what goes into the final news product. Gans argued that shared values between a reporter and a source may lead a reporter to use information from that source rather than another, more dissimilar source. Reporters and their sources, however, may be unaware of the effects of this commonality, especially when it is taken for granted.

This study looks at concrete similarities reporters may share with sources as well as reporter characteristics that may contribute to a value system that may be shared with some sources. These characteristics include socio-economic background, gender, race, education, personal politics, and experience on the statehouse beat.

Through personal interviews and surveys, this study attempts to isolate some of the values a reporter may hold. In addition, the interviews and survey questions are designed to elicit reporters' impressions of pressures and influences on their news production process. For example, reporters are asked to consider how deadline pressure affects their selection of sources and how many sources they ideally would contact for a given story. The results from the interviews and surveys will be combined into a picture of each reporter and how they see themselves performing on the job. Those reporter characteristics will be compared with a content analysis of the types of sources found in a random sample of that reporter's recent articles. This sample of each reporter's most frequently used types of sources will be considered a sample of that reporter's source repertoire, or the types of sources the reporter tends to rely on most often.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

After considering the literature available on the news production process, a remaining question points to whether the values, characteristics, and orientations that reporters bring to the news production process will influence which source types they turn to most often for information. As a result, reporters will develop "source repertoires," or regular sets of sources with whom they deal most often for information when preparing news articles.

The first set of hypotheses tests the greater frequency with which a reporter will use sources holding similar political beliefs as the reporter. For example, a reporter with conservative beliefs on social and economic issues will cite more sources from the conservative point of view.

The second set of hypotheses tests whether reporters with more experience will use fewer numbers of sources in their articles. Due to the journalistic conventions of getting articles done as quickly as possible and following routine news gathering practices that call for "traditional" sources, reporters with more years of experience in journalism, on the statehouse beat, and with educational experience in journalism programs will use fewer sources and, therefore, have a narrower, or smaller, source repertoire.

In addition, reporters who view their journalistic mission as that of a watchdog over government will use more sources than journalists who believe their mission is to record news. Reporters working in the watchdog mode will need to use more sources in their articles in order to challenge the status quo views presented by government officials, who commonly serve as the major sources in government reporting.

In line with the preceding hypothesis, a subsequent hypothesis tests whether reporters continue to use more "official" sources than non-official or non-traditional sources. In this same vein, another hypothesis will consider whether reporters use more sources that uphold the status quo than sources that challenge the status quo.

Following a pilot study with two former Delaware statehouse reporters, 28 reporters, who work for 17 newspapers covering the state capitols in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania made up the sample.

In personal interviews consisting of 24 questions, reporters discussed information about: their educational background, experience as a journalist and on the statehouse beat; interest in politics and other news topics; how they use sources in preparing news articles, and; whether they participate in community activities. Reporters then were asked to fill out an 18-question survey designed to elicit information concerning their personal politics, journalistic mission, and organizational influences on their use of sources.

Forty articles written with single bylines by each reporter were selected from among their work in 1994 and 1995. Thirty of those articles were randomly sampled from among the initial 40 retrieved to be coded for the content analysis. The researcher coded 654 of the 854 articles in the study; three other coders coded a total of 200 of the 854 articles analyzed. Four graduate students double-coded approximately 13 percent of the total sample (114 articles). Data not meeting a reliability standard of .65 using Krippendorff's alpha were not used (without notation) in this study.

The articles were coded to determine information, such as the following, for each reporter: the average number of sources used per article; the average number of different source types used per article; the type of source used first most frequently in each article; and which type of political sources received more mentions as a source type (e.g., Republican or Democratic). The types of sources used most frequently by reporters can be listed as those making up each reporter's source repertoire for future studies.

Reporters' information from the interviews and surveys was combined to determine a picture of each reporter on indices of political values, world views, journalistic mission, and experience. Regression analysis and t-tests were performed with these scales and the results from the content analysis to determine any correlations and relationships. The existence of a relationship between the reporter's position on these scales and his or her use of particular source types will be evidence of the degree of influence a reporter's beliefs, values, characteristics and orientations affect their selection and use of sources in newspaper articles.

Conclusion

Journalism can no longer be viewed as distilling the answer to the simple request for "Just the facts." We are no longer naive enough to believe that's how it works. So we must take a closer look at one of the most significant relationships that affects the daily roundup of our news: the reporter and source relationship. This study is aimed at determining the effects an individual reporter's characteristics and orientations may have on his or her selection and use of sources in newspaper articles. Are reporters who identify themselves as

more liberal using more liberal sources? Are reporters who identify themselves as government watchdogs using more sources while reporters who see their jobs as keeping the public record relying on fewer sources? This study should provide the answers to these and other questions that can significantly impact journalism as we know it.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous factors are involved in producing a newspaper each day. While it may appear to be a black-and-white process, a variety of influences are at work as reporters go about their jobs of gathering information that becomes the news. Scholars and practitioners recite the need for a free press to help maintain a democratic form of government. Yet when reporters rely mainly on members of that government for information, opportunities dim for other voices to be heard in the news pages. The first section presents some views on the media's role in the U.S. and its reliance on and support of the government. The second section identifies routines of the news gathering profession that reporters rely on to keep them "objective" in presenting the news. The third section looks at some of these routines as homogenizing factors that actually serve to keep the media producing the same content. Reporters still maintain some individual control over their news product, however, and the fourth section discusses ways in which reporters find and use sources. Finally,

the last section poses some questions about the gaps in our knowledge of reporters and their sources.

The Role of Journalism in Democracy

Normative prescriptions

Democracy was envisioned in the United States with an able-bodied press possessing the right to criticize the government; the First Amendment guarantees that right to free speech and, correspondingly, a free press. The Supreme Court and many of the states have continued to uphold the rights of the press with rulings and laws, including "sunshine laws," which require public agencies to release public information to the press, and "shield laws," which allow reporters to avoid revealing their sources.

As the fourth estate, the press assumes the role of a major player in democracy. Along with the privileges that are afforded the media, they also possess the responsibility to uphold some important social functions. But what are these functions? Several scholars have suggested lists of goals and functions for mass media in a democratic society. As such, these goals reflect certainly a late 20th century theme: diversity, or in this case, the maintenance of a plurality of diverse views, which is directly related to sources used by the media. Although not set in stone anywhere

or voted on by anyone, a consensus seems to have emerged that "ensuring diversity" (Sigal, 1973, p. 193) is what journalism is all about.

McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (1994, p. 128) list eight "democratic standards for mass media news" as they revise Gurevitch & Blumler's work. Two of these directly represent goals for diversity: (1) provisions of platforms for advocacy and (2) transmission of diverse political discourse.

"Democracy in the contemporary world is scarcely conceivable, scarcely definable without it (the press)," Schudson remarked before listing his seven goals for a media system serving democracy (1995, p. 28). Three of those goals also relate to fostering source diversity; they are: (1) The media should serve as common carriers of the perspectives of the varied groups in society; (2) the media should represent the public and speak for and to the public interest in order to hold government accountable; and (3) the news media should provide a forum for dialogue among citizens that not only informs democratic decision making but is, as a process, an element in it. Schudson noted that some of his goals for a media system in a democracy may contradict one another, which shows "We are a long way from a coherent normative theory of journalism" (1995, p. 29).

Instead, what journalists do have is the "Ideology of Objectivity," which requires reporters to remain impartial observers of what they are covering (Roshco, 1975, p. 123). Roshco believes the practice of this ideology will allow for a diversity of source viewpoints to enter the news and the public's consciousness over time.

In their studies of source diversity in the media, Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazzarella, and Rakow (1989) and Brown, Bybee, Weardon and Straughton (1987) also considered diversity a duty of the democratic press; they, too, however, never cite a source for this duty. These authors assume that diversity is a requisite characteristic of the marketplace of ideas.

Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg (1994) want to take the newspaper's role one step further. They "urge the newspaper to become the community forum for a multi-cultural society" (p. xii). In a sense, this follows what the Commission on Freedom of the Press urged more than 45 years ago: That one goal of the media is to present "a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society" (Strentz, 1978, p. 90).

This study also is concerned with how diversity is reflected in newspaper articles, specifically through the use of sources. Tendencies of reporters to follow the pack, fall back on official sources, and use the same type of experts for commentary could lead to a narrow field of sources that ultimately shapes the news. However, which sources individual reporters

seek to use will have an effect on these conditions, and it is this aspect of the newsgathering process that this study examines.

Performance evaluations. While optimists believe that airing a diverse assortment of viewpoints in the media will continue to support democratic ways, critics argue that it all depends on one's point of view.

"Variety is basically a marketing strategy that helps publishers gather a mass audience for advertisers, but it's also a cultural strategy that simulates the feel of democracy," Pauly argued in the introduction to The Conversation of Journalism (1994, p. xi). In other words, if we think the press provides us with a diversity of views, then we do not often wonder, "What's left out?"

Hester (1989) does ask that question quite often, arguing that it is the presence of the alternative press that truly guarantees democracy in the U.S. Writing in a UNESCO publication, Hester's title sums up his case: "Guarding against the abuse of power: The alternative press in the United States of America." Since the mainstream press is just that -- mainstream - - Hester asserts that the alternative press occupies an important role in maintaining a functional democracy. Through the alternative press, views that were not allowed in the mainstream press can reach the public.

In The News People, Johnstone (1976) states that alternative media use alternative sources. Without specifying further, they imply that

mainstream media use a broader range of sources; however, several researchers, such as Sigal (1973) and Soley (1992), have demonstrated that mainstream media immerse themselves in mainstream views from mainstream sources. Interestingly, Johnstone (1976) also states that these alternative sources often are friends of the alternative media journalists while mainstream journalists nobly avoid having friendships with sources. Again, Soley has shown that this is not always the case, at least with the "elite" press corps in Washington, D.C.

Hegemony

Gitlin (1980) analyzed the role of the media in furthering the mainstream during coverage of Vietnam War protesters in the late 1960s and 1970s. Gitlin analyzed the practice of the mainstream press lending support and credibility to the current system of government and government policy under the theory of "hegemony." Although one role of the American press is to act as a watchdog over the government, to play that role through the current system actually results in continuing support for the system. According to Gitlin, hegemony is the "systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order" (p. 253). By relying on the "established order" for information, reporters unwittingly perpetuate the authority and influence of this system. This is an important point for reporters to understand: if

they choose sources that only reflect the current system, then are they truly allowing for a diversity of viewpoints in the media?

Reese (1990) notes, "Journalistic practice has its own autonomy yet stands in a structured relationship with powerful institutions" (p. 392).

This structuring is supported by the status quo, or the mainstream.

Three specific hypotheses of media hegemony state:

(1) Journalists are trained to adopt the dominant ideology; (2) media content reflects a conservative perspective and tends to support the status quo; and (3) reporting is slanted pro-American, and coverage of foreign countries is negative (Lista and Lista, 1995, p. 321).

Mixed results have been achieved when testing these hypotheses (Cronkite & Lista, 1995). As a result, Cronkite and Lista cite Severin and Tankard (1981) who concluded:

Journalists adopt a variety of ideological positions, the status quo is not always supported by media reporting, and news reporters do not necessarily reflect negative evaluations of other countries and their governments (p. 321).

Without providing a numerical breakdown, these conclusions are carefully worded to allow the press to appear to offer a diversity of viewpoints while maintaining the status quo. If a few journalists support socialist candidates, does that mean their work does not support the status quo? If a few articles (out of the thousands printed daily) do not support the status quo, what is the overriding intent of news each day? And, if some articles are written showing other governments in a good light, does that mean the

majority of news is not slanted pro-American (just as hometown professional and amateur sports coverage favors the home team)?

Soley (1992) argued that the media perpetuate the mainstream through their selection of sources for commentary on news events. Washington, D.C., reporters, often considered the elite of the press corps, rely on a small group of about 100 news shapers to give background and commentary or analysis on news, Soley concluded after conducting a two-and-a-half year study of television network news programs. (In a reversal of traditional journalistic practice, he also found that newspapers followed the lead of TV network news programs and utilized the same news shapers as sources.) These news shapers share several characteristics that make them "elite." They are usually white and male, from the East Coast, educated at a private, Eastern university (probably in the Ivy League), and have worked in the White House, more often for a Republican administration, when not employed by a university or conservative think tank. These characteristics also fit many members of this elite press corps.

Soley maintained that this use of a select group of elite sources demonstrated the press's cooperation in sustaining the status quo, thereby constituting a hegemonic system. The majority of these news shapers had been affiliated with Republican administrations and used their commentaries to align support for current or future Republican

administrations as well under the guise of serving as a "political analyst" (Cooper and Soley, 1990, p. 47). Conservative philosophies usually are considered to support the status quo; as a result, the consistent use of these elite sources, the news shapers, would mean a patterned use of sources contributing supportive commentary to the status quo.

For instance, "David Gergen is the quintessential news shaper, because he attended and taught at a private, Ivy League university, was associated with a former Republican administration, worked at a conservative Washington, D.C., 'think tank,' and carries the mantle of journalist (U.S. News and World Report)" (Soley, 1992, p. 3). Ironically, since the publication of Soley's book, The News Shapers, Gergen shocked the Washington elite by joining Clinton's Democratic administration as an adviser. Although Gergen has crossed political party boundaries, Soley would say he is following the typical news shaper pattern by moving in and out of presidential administrations. Soley describes a revolving-door system in which news shapers and prestige reporters rotate among jobs in journalism, government, think-tank, and university positions.

The profile of these "prestige" journalists matches that of the news shapers. For instance, TV newswoman Diane Sawyer worked for the Nixon administration, while Leslie Gelb and Hedrick Smith, both of the

New York Times, worked in government and think-tank positions before and after stints as journalists.

Whether journalists work to maintain the status quo of our democratic society or serve as true watchdogs over it, either scenario features the individual reporter operating under organizational and professional constraints in selecting sources for an article. Both those levels of influence include the reliance on the Ideology of Objectivity.

Ideology of Objectivity

Schudson makes no bones about objectivity:

Yet the belief in objectivity is just this: the belief that one can and should separate facts from values. Facts, in this view, are assertions about the world open to independent validation. They stand beyond the distorting influences of any individual's personal preferences. Values, in this view, are an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be; they are seen as ultimately subjective and so without legitimate claim on other people (1978, p. 5-6).

While we take "objective" or "straight" newsreporting for granted today, it actually evolved during the past century. The first American publications were a partisan press and more closely resembled newsletters than the newspapers of today (Schudson, 1995). The influx of advertising dollars from department or general stores changed the shape of newspapers. As with newsletters that were usually put out by individual owners, early newspapers reflected the views of their publishers.

However, with advertising aimed at appealing to more readers than just those of one political bent, newspapers started trimming the opinion from some of the news writing.

Another factor, the founding of the Associated Press in 1848, appears to have had a great influence in the creation of "straight" newswriting (Tuchman, 1978). Since the AP had to write stories that would appeal to all of its subscribers, opinion had to be dropped from the story (Schudson, 1978). Other news services followed AP and also adopted that style of writing in an effort to maximize subscriptions from newspapers.

By the turn of the century when most leading newspapers still strove to excite readers with sensational "stories" in the true genre of yellow journalism, the New York Times began to make its mark by making a distinction between "information" carried on its pages and entertainment-type writing (Schudson, 1978). However, by 1925, newspapers and readers apparently began to understand the importance of the writer's influence on a story; the Associated Press started expanding bylined articles from just foreign correspondents to the regular news reporters by 1925. Within a few years, using bylines was a common AP practice that caught on throughout the industry.

By 1937, the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the American Society of Newspaper Publishers cited the ideal of objectivity in their objection to unionism in the ranks of their staffs: "Equally important to society, however, are those who report the controversial scene. It is the newspaperman's job to do that, not as a partisan but as an objective observer" (Schudson, 1978, p. 157). Schudson (1978) explains this use of objectivity as an appeal "to a standard whose independent authority had already been established" (p. 157).

But this ideology serves a purpose other than "keeping journalists honest," as some would say; it operates to maintain the level of privilege, legitimacy, and credibility that the profession has built up in this century. By claiming objectivity as their banner, journalists could elevate themselves from their "trade" status to that of a profession. Similarly, two of the most notable professions, law and medicine, in addition to the hard and soft sciences, rely heavily on objectivity, or keeping a professional distance, to perform their job (Schudson, 1978). Joseph Pulitzer tried to formalize journalism as a profession when he endowed the Columbia School of Journalism in the early 1900s (Schudson, 1978). The media's "self-conception," in this case the reliance on the notion of objectivity, also serves as a legitimating function (Tuchman, 1978, p. 165).

Some of the privileges accorded the profession include front row seats (or at least room to stand) at official ceremonies, rock concerts, movie premieres, and ongoing legislative functions from the local town or city level to the press gallery in Congress and access to corporate and government leaders. As far as legitimacy is concerned, several national newspapers are ranked with history texts as definitive recordings of events in our nation's past. And however the credibility of particular journalists may wane, some have become major national figures of trust (Walter Cronkite, Barbara Walters) and credibility -- the opinion leaders of our time, as communication scholars are quick to point out.

Defining Objectivity. For other scholars, and journalists themselves, defining objectivity is too difficult a task. Objectivity can be considered an antonym of bias (Hackett, 1984) or bias can be considered the lack of objectivity. But that brings up the equally vague definition of bias. Most fall back on providing an operational definition of objectivity, meaning that they show how it works or what needs to happen to create the appearance of objectivity.

Hackett (1984) declares the "common" definition of bias "as the intrusion of subjective 'opinion' by the reporter or news organization, into what is purportedly a 'factual' account" (p. 230). Hackett also divides bias into two elements: balance and distortion of reality.

Hackett (1984) analyzes how bias and objectivity are used in studies of news; he finds four commonly pursued assumptions:

(1) "The media can and ought accurately to reflect the real world..."

(2) Individual communicators' political prejudices or social attitudes make up "the most important potential obstacles" to unbiased news.

(3) "When such biases appear in news content, they can readily be detected through existing methods..."

(4) Favoritism toward one major candidate or political party is "the most important form of political or ideological bias in the media" (p. 233-4).

"Neither the political/attitudinal, nor the organizational approaches, exhaust the analysis of the news media's ideological determinants and role" (Hackett, 1984, p. 240). One element to consider in broadening these approaches is the individual journalist's participation in the media system.

Hackett (1984) also notes that "most bias research has focused on news content, rather than its conditions of production" (p. 240). This study combines the two. Hackett continues to deride the use of content analysis as the sole measure of bias in news content; this study differs from that by comparing the content analysis with reporters' survey data.

Hackett (1984) also discusses criticisms of content analysis that include the reliance on counting the frequency of items and ignoring their placement within the structure of the content. The coding instrument for this study takes both of those aspects into account: frequency with which sources appear and their order in the article (which signifies relative

importance). However, Hackett discusses content analysis that usually focuses its unit of analysis on the word, theme, or article; this study's unit of analysis is the reporter. The content analysis of news stories is used to construct variables that describe differences between reporters.

Print journalism content most closely resembles the surveillance function of mass communication, based on Lasswell's list of functions (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). "Studying content helps us infer things about phenomena that are less open and visible: the people and organizations that produce the content" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, p. 23). Shoemaker and Reese second Hackett when he recommends going beyond content analysis.

Foremost in this practice of defining objectivity by its processes is Tuchman (1972, 1978), who called objectivity a "strategic ritual."

"Strategic Rituals"

Although journalism has never been called an exact science, Tuchman did classify reporters' practices in gathering news into what she first termed "strategic rituals" in 1972. These rituals were followed by news workers across the profession to build up and maintain an objective shield. This shield is a reliance on professional routines to eradicate the perception of bias and ensure objectivity. Tuchman recognized and isolated the repetition, respect, and value journalists granted these rituals

after she carried out participant-observations and interviews during a 10-year period at one newspaper, one television news station, in the New York City Hall press room and with reporters covering the women's movement.

Codes and Conventions

As with other professionals, those within the journalistic community, especially reporters and editors, carry "shared values," according to Sigal (1973), who studied the New York Times and the Washington Post. He defined these shared values as "attitudes which might properly be called the journalist's creed, or ideology" (Sigal, 1973, p. 3). (This creed may be Sigal's version of what Tuchman described as "news judgment.") The most significant tenet of this unwritten creed consists of journalistic conventions, which also could be considered journalistic standards.

Several conventions serve the goal of objectivity for reporters. The most obvious is that of "straight news," which is described as "setting down information with a minimum of explicit interpretation. Any interpretive material that does appear in the news columns must be attributable to a news source" (Sigal, 1973, p. 66). This convention also permits one-source stories as long as all information and quotations are attributable to that one source.

"Fairness" is another convention that contributes to the appearance of objectivity by requiring each side in a story to be heard either in the same story or eventually in the same news product. In addition, the fairness convention calls for quick corrections to mistakes in previous news products. On the heels of fairness is the convention of "balance," which requires that news columns be "accessible to various sides in a political controversy" (Sigal, 1973, p. 68). This convention also raises the issue of who is qualified to serve as a news source.

Reliance on Authorities

The reliance on authorities as credible sources of information generates from a belief that leaders in organizations have more access to knowledge and decision making than any other member (Sigal, 1973). Therefore, "Today the higher up in government a man is, the better his prospects to make news" (Sigal, 1973, p. 69). The best source, of course, is the President of the United States.

While the rituals identified by Tuchman (1972, 1978) and the reliance on authority figures as sources detailed by Sigal (1973) suggest organizational and professional limitations on journalists' abilities to craft an article, they also leave much room for maneuvering by each reporter. For instance, while presenting conflicting statements may be the norm in a political story, that norm does not state which specific person from the

opposing political party must be selected for quotation. That remains the reporter's discretion (within mainstream bounds usually). This study follows up on the existence of shared values that helps build a relationship between a reporter and a source as noted by Gans (1979); it also compares each reporter's reliance on official sources to community sources and ordinary citizens. Rather than concentrating on the outside limitations on a reporter's actions, this study delves into the maneuvering space allowed each reporter to see how he or she moves.

Newspaper Bias vs. Individual Reporter Bias

Most often claims of bias in journalism are hurled at specific newspapers or the profession as a whole. Management does not necessarily deny a heavy hand. Randomly surveyed newspapers editors (Stoff, 1993) admitted that they felt pressure from advertisers and from their publishers who belonged to government or civic organizations. Editors of newspapers with smaller circulations were more likely to be influenced by advertising pressure (Stoff, 1993).

More citations can be found in which the newspaper, and not the reporter(s), receives the blame for an allegedly biased publication. Substantiated instances of newspaper bias have been reported with the blame falling on editors and others higher up in management than reporters. The story of the local district attorney who dropped charges

against a reputed mobster was not reported in the Springfield Union News until the Boston Globe, located 75 miles east, first ran the story (Bazinet, 1990). Union News reporters said that the wrong political stories commonly ended up in the garbage due to decisions by management.

Staff writers at the San Francisco Chronicle cried foul when they felt editorial pressure to nix negative items about the Giants baseball team's proposed move outside the state in 1992; but the top editor denied any unusual editing practices (Stein, 1992).

Editors play a dual role in watching out for any alleged bias by individual reporters. The editor's job is to ensure that the conventions of journalistic practice are followed, especially regarding objectivity and that any potential biases are mediated or balanced in news copy. One newspaper transferred a reporter to the copy desk due to her political activism in a gay rights group (Stein, 1993). The reporter protested that her political activism in no way interfered with her education reporting and may have enhanced it by increasing her contacts in the community. The managing editor claimed unwritten journalistic ethics opposed such outside activity by a news reporter (Stein, 1993).

On the individual level, when the writing process begins, journalists say they put their opinions aside. One example of a reporter apparently succeeding at that is A. Kent MacDougall: Years after

reporting for the Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times, MacDougall, now a professor of journalism, revealed in print that he had been a practicing socialist throughout his journalistic career (Reese, 1990). He even wrote briefly for radical presses while employed at the Journal, which is considered one of the country's most conservative, pro-business newspapers. On the other hand, some editors maintained that MacDougall's admission only served to prove how the practices of the profession worked successfully in ensuring that MacDougall's work met the standards of objectivity.

MacDougall himself defended the unwritten code of journalistic ethics despite the criticism he received after publishing his revelations. "(I was a) journalist first and a radical second throughout my career . . . I stuck to accepted standards of newsworthiness, accuracy and fairness" (Reese, 1990, p. 400, citing Shaw, 1989a, p. 15).

Levels of Influence on Newspaper Article Content

Influences on newspaper content can be studied at various levels from the micro, which begins with the individual reporter, to the macro, which takes into account societal and cultural pressures (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Although this study concentrates on the micro-level relationship between a reporter and a source, it is important to be aware of the other influences on news content and how they influence the

production of each article. The six levels of influence consist of: socio-cultural, organizational, professional, medium, individual, and reality. In addition to the items listed below, each level reflects a world view and possesses a set of codes and conventions particular to that level.

Socio-cultural. This level encompasses entire countries, including their ideology, language, resources, and economic system among other influences. "We can understand the news media better if you realize that what they produce -- news -- is a form of culture . . . News is also related to ideology and is itself a potentially indirect social force" (Schudson, 1995, p. 3). Schudson (1995) also points out that Japanese and Italian journalism varies quite a bit from American journalism, including their construction of standards.

The production of news in the United States is strongly influenced by our democratic political system as well as our capitalistic economic system. These influences can be clearly seen having macro- and micro-level effects. For instance, consider the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the rights it guarantees the press as well as private owners of news organizations (from the New York Times to CBS-TV to local radio stations). This private ownership contributed to the journalistic convention of exclusives wherein each reporter tries to uncover new information ahead of the rest of the press corps.

Furthermore, by seeking information and opinions from sources within the institutions that make up our democratic republic, reporters in effect allow an institutional bias to permeate their efforts at presenting the news. News "tends strongly to favor established institutional sources, most especially governmental, military, political, business and professional sources" (Whitney et al., 1989, p. 172.).

In addition, news conventions seem to encourage reporters to take aim at individuals within institutions while excluding the very institutions and the system themselves (Gitlin, 1980). The press tries to "expose individual malefactors rather than to attack social arrangements," Roshco (1975, p.125) writes from his viewpoint as newsman, news source, and ultimately sociologist. This action in support of U.S. institutions goes beyond institutional bias to perpetuation of the mainstream as described in the theory of hegemony.

Organizational. This level of analysis could focus on the size of the specific news organization, the size and demographics of its market and audience, the ownership (public, private, chain), style of management, organizational mission, and conventions of that specific organization. Breed (1960) showed that journalism fosters strong mores in individual newsrooms; the codes and conventions learned on-the-job can be as powerful in shaping a reporter's actions as rules learned in school. Just as

newspapers' mastheads and print styles differ, so do their organizational makeup, style, and practices. Certainly the status, history, and organizational structure of the New York Times create a different product than that of the Delaware State News, which boasts a staff of eight news reporters to serve a circulation of about 25,000.

This study looks at reporters from different size newspapers, with varying circulation sizes and organizational makeups in an effort to achieve a broad perspective on news reporters in journalism today. However, reporters' use of sources can be compared based on the size of the newspaper for which they work.

Professional. This level contains the overall purpose, values, and beliefs held by the journalistic profession. Factors at this level include training, journalistic mission, and a code of ethics, all of which can shape actions taken by members of this profession. Training in the profession starts early, often in undergraduate journalism programs, and continues on-the-job.

Strentz (1978) gives insight into what journalism students are taught about traditional and nontraditional news sources. Traditional news sources in the 20th century come from three places: "(1) beats or official news sources, (2) public relations or promotional agencies and personnel, and (3) attendance of reporters at events defined as newsworthy" (Strentz,

1978, p. 73). Nontraditional sources are located by "relatively newer, varied, or more popular approaches to newsgathering in recent years," such as precision journalism, using freedom of information laws, using anonymous or veiled sources, and using "minority group members and dissidents as news sources" (Strentz, 1978, p. 73).

Despite his treatment of nontraditional sources as second-rate sources, Strentz (1978) encourages journalists to go beyond just one or two sources.

A combination of sources -- news beats, public records, precision journalism -- can be used to inform readers and viewers rather than relying on the dubious use of one or two persons representing socially acceptable or, on the other hand, extreme points of view (Strentz, 1978, p. 93).

Strentz (1978) also cautions against some problems reporters may encounter when they work a specific beat and must deal with the same sources on a consistent basis. Beat reporters may develop so much familiarity with regular sources that they have "sympathy with the sources' problems and a sense of responsibility for the success of the sources' programs" (Strentz, 1978, p. 75), which may lead to "tunnel vision" or the exclusion of other points of view (p. 28).

Professionalism also includes journalistic mission which covers reporters' and newspapers' goals and reasons for producing the news. Some reporters may see the profession as a watchdog over government

officials; yet others may regard the profession as an active member of the community providing an additional voice or perspective rather than offering a detached view.

Finally, journalists usually share a code of ethics, such as the medical profession's Hippocratic Oath. For journalists, these ethical principles include not revealing the names of sources that have been promised anonymity, not paying sources to provide information, and not printing information after promising to keep it confidential, among others.

This study examines the use of sources by reporters in a profession that proclaims a devotion to source diversity in an effort to achieve fair and balanced reporting.

Medium. This level accounts for the various types of news production, such as the modes of conveyance: print, video or film, photography-only, and audio-only. Technology, newsgathering techniques, and conventions are other aspects of this level.

This study concentrates solely on print reporters.

Individual. This level features the factors that affect individuals, in this case, each reporter. Those factors may include education, life experience, journalistic experience, years on the beat, years at current newspaper, personal political beliefs, first-family socio-economic level,

specific job, and personal journalistic mission, all of which are covered in this study. Thus, although this study uses a microlevel analysis, it takes into consideration factors from the other levels of influence as well.

Researchers and journalists alike strongly disagree on the importance of individual effects in reporting. Schudson (1995) most recently argued that who a reporter is will influence the news that reporter writes. He pointed out that Randy Shilts, a former reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle and author of the book on AIDS, And the band played on, had said it took a reporter who was gay (Shilts) to bring the issue of AIDS to the forefront of news, although any reporter could have done it.

Of course a woman reporter is more likely than a man, other things being equal, to see rape as a newsworthy issue. Of course an African American reporter rather than a white reporter, other things being equal, will find issues in the African American community newsworthy...When minorities and women and people who have known poverty or misfortune first-hand are authors of news as well as its readers, the social world represented in the news expands and changes (Schudson, 1995, p. 8).

Schudson (1995) recommends that any systematic study of journalists should ask: "Who are journalists and what are their backgrounds and training?" (p. 105). He maintains that "no reporter is a blank slate but rather an uneven terrain. Some information will settle and some will not be absorbed at all" (p. 104). He also noted the uniform framing of the story about Zoe Baird who was nominated for U.S. Attorney General but ran into difficulty gaining approval because she and her husband had failed

to pay Social Security taxes for their immigrant, domestic workers. All but one news organization followed the issue from the viewpoint of people in Zoe Baird's situation; only Univision, the Spanish-language television network, covered it from the point of view of the domestic workers who were paid under the table.

The consensus in the mainstream press arose not from journalistic routines or patterns of ownership but from the broad class and racial bias in American society as a whole and the taken-for-granted angle of vision of mainstream journalism (Schudson, 1995, p. 8).

Sigal disagrees with similar sentiments by Rosten, but quoted from Rosten's study, The Washington Correspondents: "the social heritage, the 'professional reflexes,' the individual temperament, and the economic status of reporters assume a fundamental significance" (Sigal, 1973, p. 179). Sigal disregarded this assertion and maintained that "newsmen work not as individuals on their own, but in large-scale bureaucratic organizations" (p. 179).

In The American Journalist series of books on surveys of reporters, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 1986) argue that the next step should be analyzing reporters' characteristics in conjunction with the product produced by journalists. Another study of reporters' characteristics also draws no conclusions about their effects; in The news people, Kimball et al. "do not attempt here to link characteristics of news people or news

organizations with the specific nature of the messages they produce" (1976, p. viii).

While a newspaper's organization may affect how a reporter does her or his job, it does not cover the myriad decisions reporters make on their own, especially regarding which source to interview and which source to quote. This study concentrated on determining the effects of individual differences among reporters and the influences those differences have on their use of sources.

Reality. The final level of analysis is the most difficult to study, codify, and certainly define. Scholars have debated the existence and parameters of reality for centuries. Although reporters subscribe to the belief that they represent "objective" reality in their work, philosophers would counter that they can only represent reality as they perceive it. After a doctoral quest for objectivity and its role in communication, former-reporter McKinzie (1994) concluded:

It appears there are excellent philosophical and theoretical reasons for believing that objective communication is impossible, but there are equally compelling reasons for concluding that belief in the concept endures because of practical necessity. Presumptions related to the concept form a backdrop for understandings that are essential for the accomplishment of everyday living (p. 3).

Sigal (1973) suggests that news provides a sampling of the reality that is out there. However, he notes, that this sampling contains value judgements used by the reporters and editors who assembled the news package.

Readers . . . tend to lose sight of the point that news is not reality, but a sampling of reality. As large organizations, all that newspapers can do is to establish some standard operating procedures for sampling what is happening. Whatever procedures they adopt will bias the selection of information. No procedure can guarantee a sampling that will satisfy every reader . . . (1973, p. 187).

While this level plays a role in reporters' efforts to obtain objectivity, it otherwise is not a consideration in this study.

Homogenizing Factors

All of the above factors influence the process of news production and have been examined to some extent in the literature. The focus of this study is on the individual reporter's role in news production; the individual's product is mediated--or homogenized--by the foregoing factors, which are discussed at other levels of analysis. Before zeroing in on the individual's role, it is important to recognize some of the major homogenizing factors operating at other levels.

Socio-cultural Level

Hegemony. According to Gitlin (1980), hegemony is the "systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order" (p. 253). Brown et al. (1987) conclude that, "Consequently, the bias toward elite sources could be seen, not as an excess, but as legitimation of the existing system" (p. 53), which fits the definition of hegemony. They also cite Gitlin when they suggest that the "sequence of political power" may begin even earlier with "basic ideological viewpoints, which may be so ingrained that they are unacknowledged" (p. 54). This narrowing of scope for potential sources also acts as a narrowing of possible information by and for reporters and other news workers, such as editors and television news producers, and ultimately the public.

Schudson (1995) offered that the quest for objectivity could serve an anti-hegemony function. Referring to Harrison Salisbury, an early 20th century newsman, Schudson wrote, "He showed forcefully the unending capacity of the objective stance to be seditious," particularly when Salisbury was the first reporter in Hanoi during the Vietnam war (p. 108).

Professional

Strategic rituals. Tuchman (1972) identified five rituals that she documented reporters following throughout the profession. These rituals are:

(1) Presenting conflicting possibilities--Most news stories are predicated around a conflict whether real or developed by the journalist. When sources or speakers in an article do not conflict blatantly (e.g. two candidates for an elected office), reporters may use conflicting statements to build the story. The presentation of these conflicting sides of the story also allow the reporter to claim objectivity because he or she has not favored one side or the other. While all sides--or angles--to a story may not be presented in the same article on a given day, Tuchman (1972) credits journalists with believing that news consumers "will receive a diversity of views over a period of time" (p. 666).

Of course, this ritual is not a perfect procedure. Tuchman (1972) mentions in a footnote that due to the inverted pyramid structure of news stories, information appearing at the beginning of a story will be deemed more important and will be read by more consumers than information that follows. In addition, charges or allegations usually receive more attention because they are listed at the top of an article, while denial or explanations fall below. She also points out that presenting conflicting possibilities has nothing to do with dictionary definitions of objectivity.

(2) Presentation of supporting evidence -- Most news stories include a reliance on "facts," which are "commonly accepted as 'truth'."

(3) Judicious use of quotation marks -- Most commonly, quotation marks are used to signal the use of words spoken by someone other than the reporter. However, quotation marks also can be used to indicate "so-called," as in the name a group or organization gives itself or a word or phrase used by a source in a manner that the reporter wishes to question or that is not considered common or mainstream.

(4) Structuring information in an appropriate sequence -- The most "important" or "interesting" items in a news article are supposed to be placed by the reporter in the top of the story, the nadir of the inverted pyramid. Often these facts consist of the five W's -- who, what, when, where, why, and how -- sometimes called the "material facts." When not relying on the five W's to dictate how an article should begin, a reporter may fall back on his or her own "news judgment." Tuchman (1972) describes "news judgment" as "professional acumen" and defines it as the ability to choose 'objectively' between and among competing 'facts, (and) to decide which 'facts' are more 'important' or 'interesting'" (p. 670). Reporters also will rely on "common sense" to contribute to news judgment.

(5) Use of the label "news analysis" -- Although Tuchman (1972) lists this separately from the first four rituals, it appropriately falls into the same category of practice. She quotes one editor as defining news analysis as the blatant inclusion of value judgments. If this definition is accepted, then the rest of the newspaper's articles must be deemed "valueless" or "straight objective" (1972, p. 671). "Just as quotation marks theoretically establish a distance between the reporter and a story and signal that the materials enclosed may be problematic," the label "news analysis" puts up the distinction that what follows includes the reporter's interpretation of the "facts" (p. 671).

Rather than ensure the achievement of objectivity, Tuchman (1972) points out that following these procedures actually only "may provide demonstrable evidence of an attempt to obtain objectivity" (p. 676). In fact, she quotes Gouldner (1970, p. 249), who says these practices add up to an operational definition of objectivity. Just as a news story always has more than one side, these rituals may be viewed from another, more discouraging vantage point. Tuchman (1972) outlines that:

- Presenting conflicting possibilities actually may serve as "an invitation to selective perception" (p. 676) on the part of the readers.
- Presentation of supporting evidence may "mistakenly insist the 'facts speak for themselves'" (p. 676).

- • The judicious use of quotation marks may serve as a discrediting device and a means of introducing the reporter's opinion.
- • Structuring information in an appropriate sequence may be "bounded by the editorial policy of a particular news organization."
 - Use of the label "news analysis" may "mislead the news consumer by suggesting that 'news analysis' is weighty, ponderous, or definitive."

Tuchman (1972) also discusses the journalist's interwoven use of "common sense" and "news judgment" in defending choices of news content. "Undocumented 'facts' which the newsmen accept as proven reveal the extent to which news judgments may be based upon common sense" (Tuchman, 1972, p. 674). She could find no clear definition of "news judgment" except "the news judgment which justifies 'sense' seems to be sacred professional knowledge" (1972, p. 675), which amounts to a particular way of looking at the world.

In his article on the news profession's responses to journalist A. Kent MacDougall's revelations of his socialist leanings, Reese (1990) nicely sums up journalists' use of rituals: "In the absence of well-defined theoretical guideposts, journalists rely more heavily than scientists on routines as a basis and justification for descriptions of reality" (p. 393).

Reese (1990) discusses several ways the journalistic community acted to "repair" the "news paradigm" that was disturbed by MacDougall's announcement; one method is most applicable to an analysis at the individual level. Reese (1990) shows that some members of the journalistic community attempted "marginalizing the man and his message making both appear ineffective" (p. 390) instead of opening a can of worms that would require an intense look at the profession as a whole. If MacDougall could be discredited in such a way, in essence, the effects, influences or contributions of any single reporter could be so marginalized. If that is true, then perhaps the whole (profession) is greater than its parts (reporters and editors, etc.). But further analysis at the individual level is needed to demonstrate whether individual reporters do affect their news coverage and to what extent.

Codes and conventions. Sigal (1973) explained that the reliance on authorities may be due to a belief that those in leadership positions have greater access to knowledge and decision making and therefore make the most credible sources.

This convention does help to protect the news media from some charlatans and hucksters who compete for coverage. Yet it disposes reporters to rely primarily on men (*sic*) in authority for information. This disposition is the same whether they are covering a student demonstration at Columbia University or a riot in a ghetto . . . Partly as a result of this convention, information from

officials and the conventional wisdom prevailing in official circles dominate press coverage of events (Sigal, 1973, p. 70).

In his study of front-page stories in the Times and the Post, Sigal (1973) found that U.S. government officials made up almost one-half of all sources cited in the sample. Executive branch officials dominated, while Congressional sources accounted for 6 percent, and judiciary sources accounted for about 2 percent of sources who were categorized as U.S. officials.

Other news conventions Sigal (1973) cites include:

- *News pegs*, which require that news items be related to discrete events and that they be recent or timely.

- *Exclusives*, which date to the days when circulation could be boosted in the short run by capturing stories before the competition. As a result, today promotion and even Pulitzer Prizes depend on a reporter's ability to win exclusives ahead of the competing news organizations.

- *Inverted pyramid, short leads, and headlines*, all of which allow readers to grasp the essence of an article in a brief space.

- *Interpretation of news*, which includes the muckraking tradition of reporters' "constant search for impropriety and illegality often at the expense of other issues" (p. 74). Illegality among city leaders is easier to tackle than an analysis of urban blight, for example.

Sigal (1973) notes that alternative criteria do not necessarily provide better guarantees of news validity. Yet journalists search to validate these traditional conventions:

The more widely the old conventions are shared, moreover, the greater the consensus in the journalism community on what news should be; and the more newsmen publish the same information, the more assured they feel about the validity of that information (Sigal, 1973, p. 75).

One decade later Brown et al. (1987) found continued support for Sigal's thesis and for journalists' reliance on high-status sources in general. "Continued reliance on governmental and other elite sources necessarily limit the diversity of information available to the public" (Brown et al., p. 54). They suggest the use of elite sources is based on a socially shared "assumption" that they are "suitable spokespersons for their organizations. Consequently, the bias toward elite sources could be seen, not as an excess, but as legitimation of the existing system" (p. 53). In addition, if all reporters rely on officials as the most authoritative sources, again a homogenizing effect would be produced.

Groupthink as pack reporting. Shoemaker (1991) relies on Janis' *Groupthink* theory as one reason journalists may end up following pack reporting at times. In the case of reporters and sources, Groupthink would lead a group of journalists who were covering the same event or issue to use the same sources so as to avoid bringing any negative attention upon themselves if they strayed from the pack. Shoemaker refers to pack journalism as coined by Timothy Crouse in his 1973 book, The boys on the bus, which followed the media as it covered the major presidential candidates in the 1972 election.

Shoemaker (1991) maintains that three requirements for Groupthink must be present for journalists to fall prey to the trap:

- (1) Group members overestimate the group's invulnerability and morality. She uses the example of 40 U.S. journalists who were captured by Iraqi troops during the Persian Gulf War as an instance of Groupthink; they were incensed at the U.S. government's control over information and accessibility and went out on their own.
- (2) Closedmindedness -- group members close off their minds to alternative viewpoints and think of themselves as the final arbiters of what the public needs to know.
- (3) Pressures from within the group toward group uniformity. "Journalists have an ever-present need to validate their own news sense" (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 30).

Soley (1992) found similar group attachments in his study of Washington, D.C. correspondents. One news producer, who requested anonymity, told Soley (1992): "There's just that Golden Rolodex that everyone goes to and everyone knows is safe" (p. 48). If one were to choose a socialist, this producer explained, "you'd mark yourself as someone to be kept an eye on" (p. 30).

Sigal (1973) agrees with the assessment of pack reporting, putting to rest the myth of the crusading, independent reporter:

Outside their organizations, reporters are by no means lone wolves either; they travel in packs. A reporter seldom covers a news development by himself. Most beats or locations regularly covered by a reporter also have others on assignment there from rival news organizations (1973, p. 4).

Source Usage

Reporters are judged professionally by the sources they keep (Schudson, 1995, p. 91).

What the news is depends very much on who its sources are. If each day's front page were like a single frame in a movie, the composite series of still frames would necessarily contain some distortion. What is the nature of the distortion? While the camera might belong to newsmen, the lights are in the hands of their sources, who tend to aim them in directions which they find advantageous, leaving many things in shadow and still more in total darkness. Moreover, if every other news source had a flashlight to point wherever he chose to, senior officials would have a spotlight and the President, a beacon (Sigal, 1973, p. 189).

In the above scenario, Sigal (1973) paints a clear picture of the importance of sources in shaping the news. "For the reporter, in short, most news is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened, thus making the choice of sources crucial" (Sigal, 1973, p. 69).

Yet little research has been done on how reporters, operating within the constraints of their organizations and professional standards, actually select and use sources. Breed (1960) pointed out how reporters learn through trial-and-error, or a type of organizational indoctrination, which types of sources an editor or editors would accept. Following this reward and punishment method, reporters would learn to recognize the guidelines or constraints provided by their organization. These could include the reliance on officials as authoritative sources, for example. But within those constraints, how does the individual reporter act? If an article calls for a quotation from a Democratic and a Republican source, which member of each party does the reporter choose to represent that source type? And how does this selection relate to the reporter's own experiences, characteristics, and orientations?

By treating news as the result of what sources say rather than events that took place, reporters actually allow sources to shape the news. However, reporters play constant "bargaining games" with their sources, who are usually government officials. As a result, "news is an outcome of

the bargaining interplay of newsmen and their sources" (Sigal, 1973, p. 5). In addition to shaping the news, sources frame the news (Reese, 1990) or provide the context in which information should be considered.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) assert that routines limit the ability of reporters to select information and sources for publication; in addition routines make up the immediate environment and social reality of reporters. Routines play an important role in determining how a reporter carries out his or her job. Tuchman's (1978) "news net" represents the routine placement of reporters at locations, usually in and around government activities, where items considered newsworthy will take place or be found. For instance, court reporters may be based in the courthouse while city hall reporters may be based in city hall for quick and easy access to meetings, offices, and other possible source meeting grounds.

Within this news net, reporters can be found following news gathering routines that Sigal (1973) separated into a variety of channels:

- Routine channels include official proceedings, press releases, press conferences, and non-spontaneous events (ceremonies, etc.);
- Informal channels include background briefings, leaks, nongovernmental proceedings, such as professional association meetings, and reports from other news organizations, interviews with other reporters and editorials;

- Enterprise channels include interviews conducted at the reporter's initiative, spontaneous events witnessed firsthand, independent research, and a reporter's own conclusions and analysis.

While reporters follow common routines for news gathering, government officials follow similar routines for releasing information to the news media. "A good deal of the news is a product of the coupling of two information-processing machines" (Sigal, 1973, p. 4). As long as nearly all news people follow this practice, news will continue to be produced in this manner. "The conventions of newsmaking authenticate the news that they publish, as well as legitimating their procedures for obtaining it" (Sigal, 1973, p. 181).

In contrast to Sigal's emphasis on the constraints of organizational and professional routines, Gans (1979) noted the importance of shared values between reporters and sources. Almost insidiously, shared values between a reporter and a source may lead that reporter to use information from that source rather than another, more dissimilar source. Reporters -- and their sources -- may be unaware of the effects of this commonality, especially when it is taken for granted. Despite years of training and following conventions of the trade, reporters will fall back on basic human qualities, such as similarities in beliefs and ease of conversation, when building relationships with some sources. Gans, through his research as a

participant-observer, catalogued some ways in which sources solicited reporters. As a result, Gans suggested further research in the area of the reporter-source relationship, especially to look at how reporters seek out sources, which this study attempts to tackle.

In his study of reporters covering the Indiana legislature, Fico (1983) quoted one experienced statehouse reporter who described the workings between reporters and legislators: "...good personal relationships were the rule, not the exception" (p. 5) despite the expected sense of being adversaries.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping, quite simply, is the act of deciding what will be allowed through the gate, or the news porthole, so to speak. Journalists were first described as gatekeepers in 1950 by David Manning White (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). As Strentz (1978) noted, "Equally important, as recognized by the press in more recent years, is that the nature of the debate also is shaped by whom the media do not use as sources" (p. 70). A clear way of seeing the effects of gatekeeping is to look at whom and what are left out of the news. LaSorsa and Reese (1990) second this point when they compare the selection of sources to the gatekeeping role played by reporters:

Audience members, however, cannot judge sources they do not hear. Thus, in addition to choice of stories, news

media wield enormous gatekeeping responsibility in their selection of sources, which largely determines the way stories are framed" (p. 111).

When sources influence what reporters write, in essence, the sources are influencing the gatekeeping process. Although Shoemaker (1991) discusses gatekeeping primarily on the organizational level, she does pay heed to the effects of individuals in the organization. "The gatekeeper's personal opinion may also influence the selection of arguments in news stories and editorials" (p. 26).

Shoemaker (1991) cites a 1971 study by Flegel and Chaffee who found that reporters at two newspapers listed their most likely influences in the following order: their own opinions, their editors', their readers', and the advertisers'. The influence of sources was not given as an option in that work; however, for a reporter covering the beat or a well-known topic, sources' opinions are probably known before contacting them for an article.

Patterned use of sources

While Soley (1992) found a pattern in the type of sources used most frequently as experts by journalists, Reese, Grant, and Danielian (1994) found a "structural pattern of sources" in TV network news programs. For instance, networks appeared to take turns interviewing the

same top-level officials from government or think tanks. This study also demonstrated what Sigal (1973) found earlier: the predominance of sources who are government officials. This consistent use of the same or similar sources across the networks shows how public affairs are shaped by the selection and use of sources (Reese et al., 1994).

Soley (1992) and Reese et al. (1994) found a patterned use of sources that fit a pre-formed mold or type across the news profession. While Reese et al. examined TV news programs, Soley analyzed Washington, D.C. journalists as a group. But where does the pattern begin to take shape? On the medium level? On the professional level? Or can the outline of the pattern be spotted on the individual level within the workings -- or selections -- of individual reporters?

This study builds from previous research to determine whether an average reporter, following the routine practices of newsgathering on the statehouse beat, uses more sources with whom he or she shares similar values and who may be government officials than sources who hold dissimilar values and are not government officials. The resulting pattern of each reporter's source pool would be considered that reporter's *source repertoire*. Fico (1983), who talked about a reporter's source pool, recommended a broadening in diversity of sources used by statehouse reporters in Indiana. This study will determine what kind of source

repertoire the average reporter covering a mid-Atlantic statehouse beat has developed.

While previous studies have utilized the participant-observer methodology and have quoted from some interviews with reporters, this study combines personal interviews and written surveys of reporters with content analysis of their printed work.

Research Goals

This study is seeking to determine how reporters' personal experiences, characteristics, and orientations influence the makeup of their source repertoires.

Reporters' Political Orientations

The first set of hypotheses looks at whether reporters use more sources with whom they share political beliefs or more sources with whom they disagree on political matters. Gans (1979) asserted that reporters seem to be drawn to sources with whom they agree or *share values*. Soley (1992) found that Washington journalists who used sources that fit the typical mold actually fit that mold themselves. For instance, many of the journalists in the Washington press pool share similar backgrounds and educations with the expert sources they rely upon; these journalists also may have worked with these expert sources in the news business. Source

preference also can be measured by placement within the structure of the story. The convention in journalism to put information deemed more important in the top of the inverted pyramid story structure may lead journalists to more frequently quote sources with whom they agree early in articles than sources with whom they disagree.

Hypothesis 1A -- Political Orientation and Use of Conservative Sources. Reporters who say they are more conservative on economic and social issues will use more sources who are identified with more conservative interests on those issues.

Hypothesis 1B -- Political Orientation and Use of Liberal Sources.

Reporters who say they are more liberal on economic and social issues will use more sources who are identified with more liberal interests on those issues.

Reporters' Journalism Experience

The second set of hypotheses looks at how reporters' experience in journalism may influence their use of diverse and numerous sources. Considering the journalistic conventions of getting stories done to meet a daily deadline, trying to beat the competition by being first to publish articles containing new information, and relying on government officials as authoritative sources, these hypotheses posit whether experience in the

profession will lead to a decline in source diversity and sheer numbers. Sigal (1973) found consistent use of U.S. government officials as sources in almost half the front-page news stories he studied. Fico (1983) found that reporters with less experience used a greater variety of sources than reporters with more experience. In addition, he found that reporters with more experience relied more on legislative leaders as the sources in their reduced source usage.

Finally, journalism experience could be said to begin in formal journalism training programs, such as those run by colleges and universities. Since the conventions of news gathering are taught as early as the first journalism classes, reporters who graduated from those programs could be considered to have more journalism experience or to have greater understanding and/or adoption of journalistic conventions that might lead them to use fewer sources in their work.

Hypothesis 2A -- Journalistic Experience and Number of Sources Used. Reporters with more than five years of journalistic experience will use fewer sources than reporters with less than five years journalistic experience. Many journalists leave the profession after five years (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996), so this seems to be an appropriate point for testing differences.

Hypothesis 2B -- Beat Experience and Number of Sources Used.

Reporters with more than two years experience on the statehouse beat will use fewer sources than reporters with less than two years on the statehouse beat. After two years on this beat, a reporter would not be considered a novice. Two years of experience would allow a reporter to cover a legislative session twice, once to figure out how it works and the second time to build a pattern of newsgathering processes.

Hypothesis 2C -- Education and Number of Sources Used. Reporters who graduated from journalism training programs will use fewer sources than reporters who do not have journalism degrees.

Supporting the Status Quo

The third set of hypotheses deals with the potential effect of source usage on maintaining or destabilizing government operations. The journalistic convention of relying on officials as authoritative sources could lead to hegemonic considerations, such as support for those in power or the status quo. When working on the statehouse beat, that practice could lead to using more sources who are legislative leaders than sources who are members of the minority parties or other people who oppose the current leadership. Since our capitalistic society strongly supports our democratic practices, the status quo also could be supported via greater

representation of business interests in news articles than the interests of workers (represented by labor or union advocates) or the community (represented by non-profit agencies).

Hypothesis 3A -- Use of Government and Non-Government Sources. Statehouse reporters quote/paraphrase more officials of government and government-type agencies than people unassociated with politics or government or its agencies.

Hypothesis 3B -- Use of Business and Labor Sources. Statehouse reporters quote/paraphrase more business representatives than representatives of unions or labor and community service organizations combined.

Hypothesis 3C -- Political Affiliation of Sources Used. Statehouse reporters quote/paraphrase more legislative leaders from the political party in power than legislators from the minority party.

Depending on the nature of the hypothesis, they will be tested with regression, a t-test, nonparametric procedures, or a combination of these.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to discover whether reporters' own beliefs, characteristics, and orientations affect their selection and use of sources in newspaper articles. To that end, this study combines personal interviews and surveys of statehouse reporters with the results of a content analysis of 30 randomly sampled articles written by each reporter to determine the relationship between reporter characteristics and source usage patterns.

Reporters

Sample of Statehouse Reporters

This study focuses on reporters who cover the "statehouse beat," which typically includes the state legislature (e.g., House and Senate), the governor, election campaigns for these offices, the state budget, departments of state government (e.g. Delaware's Department of Administrative Services), and, depending on the state and the newspaper's organization, decisions and appointments/elections to the state Supreme Court. Some of these reporters also wrote articles about election campaigns for U.S. Senate and Congressional offices.

In order to make fair and consistent comparisons among reporters' news production processes, the sample came from reporters who covered similar beats. The statehouse beat was selected because of the wide variety of issues, people, and events usually considered newsworthy to statehouse reporters. The wide variety of news topics provides an opportunity to analyze reporters' source selections across a number of areas, such as elections, politics, finances, and health and human services. This facilitates an in-depth analysis of reporters' source repertoires. In addition, due to the obvious political nature of the statehouse beat, the effect of reporters' personal political beliefs on their choice of political sources is revealed. Because of the visibility of many of the articles that are generated on this beat (e.g. the governor's annual State of the State address), reporters on this beat usually have several years' reporting experience.

Breaking tradition with previous studies that have researched bias and source usage on the organizational or professional levels, this study uses the reporter as the unit of analysis. Data collected from interviews and surveys of individual reporters as well as content analysis of their articles will be used to describe the individual reporters' news gathering behaviors and personal orientations.

While some studies have focused on Washington, D.C., reporters (e.g. Soley, 1992), who are sometimes considered the elite of the press corps, this study looks at statehouse reporters because they are more representative of the majority of political reporters nationwide. In addition, the 28 reporters who participated in the study worked at 18 different newspapers ranging in size from the 18,000-circulation Star Democrat of Easton,

Md., to the national Washington Post and New York Times. Statehouse reporters were drawn from four eastern U.S. states: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Reporters were selected for participation in the study based on their availability, willingness to participate, and length of time on the beat (at least one legislative session). The researcher located reporters willing to participate by culling newspaper bylines, roaming capital newsrooms, and asking reporters for names of other regular statehouse reporters who worked for newspapers. Before participating, the researcher told reporters that the study was concerned with why reporters entered the field of journalism, what they think of the field now, and how they carry out their job. A consent form was prepared for reporters to sign before participating in the study (See Appendix D).

The final sample included 28 reporters who worked for the following newspapers: (The numbers in parentheses represent the number of reporters from each state and from each newspaper in that capital.)

- Delaware (3) -- Delaware State News (1) and Wilmington News Journal (2)
- Maryland (6) -- The Capital (Annapolis) (1), (Easton) Star Democrat (1),
The Sun (Baltimore) (2), and the Washington Post (2)
- New Jersey (7) -- Asbury Park Press (2), New York Times (1), Philadelphia Inquirer (2), Trenton Times (2)
- Pennsylvania (12) -- (Allentown) Morning Call (2), Erie Daily Times (1),
Harrisburg Patriot News (2), Philadelphia Daily News (1),

Philadelphia Inquirer (3), Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (1),

Tribune Review (of Pittsburgh) (1), and York Daily Record (1)

Only one reporter refused outright to participate; a few said they would participate at a more convenient time. Due to vacations and busy reporting schedules, six reporters participated by telephone. Six were interviewed and surveyed in their newspaper's capital bureau office or regular headquarters, and the remaining 21 were interviewed and surveyed in their state capitols. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity (except for the researcher who contacted each reporter) in the study.

The questionnaire and the survey were pilot tested by the researcher with two former statehouse reporters.

Reporter Procedures

The researcher conducted each of the 28 personal interviews, which consisted of the 24 questions listed on the questionnaire. The researcher took extensive verbatim notes on the participants' answers. Interview length ranged from 25 to 75 minutes, averaging about 35 minutes. Participants were then asked to complete the 18 survey questions and return the survey to the researcher that same day. (Two returned it the next day.)

Questionnaire

The questionnaire measured: education, experience, world view, perceptions of the journalistic mission, source usage, source preferences, community participation, and relationship parameters with sources.

The education questions yielded information regarding whether reporters received a college degree, and if so, if it was in a journalism major or another major. Those who were not journalism majors would be presumed to learn more about being a reporter through on-the-job training.

Information from the experience questions would be used to compare with a reporter's source use; it is hypothesized that the more experience a reporter has, the fewer different source types he or she will use on a regular basis.

Questions about reporters' views of state and national problems represent measures of world views. Reporters' reasons for entering journalism are used, in combination with several survey questions, to help determine their perception of journalistic mission.

Items about reporters' source usage show how reporters think they conduct themselves on the job.

These answers could be compared to the results of the content analysis of average source usage. In addition, information about source preferences also could be compared to the content analysis of average source usage.

Finally, a reporter's participation in the community and personal parameters with sources on her or his beat reflect their attitudes about dealing with sources on and off the job. Reporters were asked about their political preferences using standard political party associations and where they considered themselves in the political spectrum regarding economic issues and social issues. A political index was created for each reporter by

combining the reporter's answer to where the reporter falls on the political spectrum for economic issues and for social issues, and averaging the answer.

Survey

Items in the survey were selected to measure and/or identify variables that mediate reporters' personal biases and their use of sources.

The first set of items asked for a reporter's perception (7=Very Strong to 0=Not Very Strong) of how various standard journalistic routines affected their use of sources. Deadline pressure was the first aspect considered. Newspapers generally operate with specific daily deadlines that reporters must meet in order to get their stories in the next day's newspaper. As the deadline approaches, and pressure to finish an article increases, reporters may alter their source selection and usage criteria in order to meet the deadline.

Using the same scale (7=Very Strong to 0=Not Very Strong), reporters were asked how editors' suggestions for source selection influenced reporters. Often editors will ask reporters to interview specific sources to be included in an article. Finally, reporters were asked about the importance of a source's availability, a source's quotability (ability to comment in a succinct and articulate manner), and a source's prominence (job responsibilities, fame, prestige).

Reporters can find sources and gather information in a variety of ways. They were asked in the second set of items "how often do you get information in each of the following ways: "Phone interviews, in-person interviews, press conferences, press releases, newspaper library, computer data bases, and other reporters." The scale was 0=Never,

1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Frequently, and 4=Always. Often press conferences and press releases are considered "packaged" news, where typically official sources prepare information for distribution to the entire press corps in the hopes of gaining publicity. Gandy (1984) has called this practice "news subsidies" in his book of the same name. When a reporter gathers information outside of press conferences and press releases, the reporter may exercise more control over source selection.

Next in the survey, reporters were asked to respond to 10 statements using the scale 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Mildly Disagree, 4=Mildly Agree, 5=Agree, and 6=Strongly Agree. The first three statements measured any connections a reporter may have developed toward the statehouse beat. Researchers and journalists point out that some beat reporters become so attached to the people on their beat that they give their allegiance to the newsmakers instead of keeping the appropriate journalistic distance required to do their jobs objectively (Breed, 1960; Strentz, 1978).

Reporters were also asked about the appropriateness of a reporter being involved in community activities where they work. Again this statement is concerned with the concept of objectivity. Many newspapers have written or unwritten policies that prohibit reporters from joining community activities in an effort to maintain the perception of objectivity.

The next two statements ask reporters to judge if it is appropriate for reporters to befriend people who work on their beat and other journalists who also cover their beat. Answers to these questions could bring insight about reporters' willingness to develop possible conflicts of interest and may add insight about reporters' competitive tendencies.

Two statements ask reporters to judge whether union membership affects how reporters do their jobs and whether they believe "news organizations' editorial staff should be unionized." While the topic of unionized workers is of interest to many workers in journalism as in other fields, these questions were designed to test reporters' orientation toward unions, which could be compared with the number of union source types they used in their sampled articles.

Another statement asked reporters if they would prefer an "advocate" press. An advocate press is defined as one in which the notion of objectivity is dropped and reporters and newspapers clearly take positions on news topics.

Finally, reporters were asked if their stories were edited "to fit the newspaper's or news organization's editorial stance on an issue." A reporter's source repertoire could be affected by such editing, if certain sources were added or removed from articles written by that reporter.

Journalistic mission is considered part of the goals and outlook a reporter maintains toward doing his or her job. The most frequently noted form of journalistic mission is the watchdog role where reporters act as a check on the government. Reporters were asked to measure each goal from 0 to 7, where 0=Not at all Important and 7=Very Important. The goals included serving as a public watchdog, serving as a recorder of events, promoting community activities, and offering or supporting a wide range of viewpoints on important issues.

Reporters were asked for their current experience with unions at their news organizations and to rate their interest in politics from 0=Not At All Interested to 7=Very Strongly Interested.

Two items asked reporters to rate separately their political views on economic and social issues on a range of Very Conservative, Conservative, Somewhat Conservative, Neutral, Somewhat Liberal, Liberal, and Very Liberal. These items were used to measure reporters political beliefs, which would be compared with the make-up of their source repertoires. The Pearson correlation coefficient for items Economic views and Social Issues views was .5143 with $p = .005$. In addition, reporters were asked for their political party registration and if they voted in the last election (November, 1994).

Two subsequent items asked reporters to rate **other** reporters with whom they come in contact regarding their political views on economic and social issues. The media are under a constant barrage of criticism for being liberal. These six items were designed to gather current information on the politics and political activity of reporters.

As we know, values are instilled first in the home. Gans (1979) has drawn a clear portrait of the influence of shared values between a reporter and sources, and socio-economic status can be considered to affect the development of values. This survey included an item asking reporters to describe the socio-economic status of the family in which they grew up. The scale included Upper Class, Upper Middle Class, Middle Class, Lower Middle Class, and Lower Class.

Finally, reporters were asked to list the newspapers they read on a daily basis, a weekly (or weekend) basis, and the magazines they had subscriptions to or read regularly. The political orientation of the magazines listed could be added to the measurement of a reporter's political orientation. In addition, the newspapers a reporter chose to read showed another element of influence.

Follow-up

Reporters who participated in the study received letters thanking them for the time and effort they contributed to this research (Appendix B). The letter stated that the study concerned why people became reporters and how they use sources to carry out their jobs.

Descriptives

Demographic information compiled during the reporter questionnaire and survey was used in calculating results for some of the hypotheses. The most relevant reporter information includes education major, years on the beat, years' experience, and political orientation; these variables were used to analyze the article data. Three-quarters (21) of the reporters graduated at least from college; two finished high school; four had obtained master's degrees; and one earned a law degree. Of those who attended college, 15 were journalism or communication majors (or graduated from a journalism school or program), and six reporters were English majors. The average number of years of journalism experience was 15. Six reporters had 10 years of experience in journalism; another three reporters had 15 years' experience; and two reporters had 20 years' experience. The

average number of years at their current newspaper was eight, although the mode was two years which represented five reporters. The average number of years on the beat was six. Fifteen reporters were registered Democrats; three were registered Republicans; and eight were not registered with any political party. Two did not answer the question.

Reporters rated their political leanings on two issue types: economic and social issues. The scale ranged from 1 = Very Liberal to 4 = Neutral, to 7 = Very Conservative. For economic issues, the mean was 3.8, or just .2 beyond Neutral and toward Liberal. The mode was 3 with eight reporters declaring themselves “Somewhat Liberal” on economic issues. For social issues, the mean was 2.9. The mode was 3 with nine reporters declaring themselves “Somewhat Liberal” on social issues and eight reporters declaring themselves “Liberal.” When asked how other reporters felt on economic issues, the mean was 3, which was “Somewhat Liberal.” When asked how other reporters felt on social issues, the mean was 2.6, which falls between “Somewhat Liberal” at 3 and “Liberal” at 2. The mean for “Interest in Politics” was 6.25 with 7 being “Very Strongly Interested” and 6 being “Strongly Interested.” Only two of the 28 reporters surveyed did not vote in the previous election in November, 1994.

Nineteen reporters worked at newspapers where they were unionized; nine reporters worked for papers that were not unionized. Thirteen reporters belonged to a union. When asked whether news organizations’ staffs should be unionized, the mean was 4, which was “Mildly Agree.” When asked to rate the statement, “Membership in a news organization’s

union influences how reporters do their job,” the mean was 3.2 (where 3 = Mildly Disagree and 4 = Mildly Agree), although 12 reporters answered 1 or “Strongly Disagree.”

When asked to rate the influence of certain factors “in terms of how strongly they influence your selection of sources for a story,” the mean selected for “source availability” was 5.31 on a scale where 0 was “Not Very Strong” and 7 was “Very Strong.” Using the same scale, source prominence had a mean of 5.5. Source quotability had a mean of 5.14 on the same scale.

All 28 reporters found the media’s “watchdog role” over the behavior of government officials to be important. Twenty rated it 7 (“Very Important”) and eight rated it 6 on a scale where 0 is “Not at all Important.” The mean was 6.7.

Reporter Concepts

The questionnaire and survey were designed to yield information that could be used to assess the following concepts that may influence how reporters use sources: education level and major program of study; number of years’ experience as a reporter; number of years’ experience on a specific news beat; number of years’ experience working for a particular newspaper; and political beliefs about economic and social issues. Education is of interest because reporters graduated from college may use different skills than reporters who did not attend or graduate from college. College major is important because of the specialized training students may receive by attending those programs rather than waiting to learn more about journalism on-the-job. Experience as a reporter may influence the numbers and types of sources a reporter has become comfortable interviewing and relying

upon. Experience on a specific beat again may show an influence in a reporter's choice of sources: a more experienced reporter may use the same small group of sources over and over; or an experienced reporter may use a wide variety of sources met during several years on a beat. A reporter's working style may be shaped by the length of experience at a particular newspaper and that reporter's adherence to organizational norms of behavior. Finally, a reporter's political beliefs may influence the reporter to interview or not interview a source based on the source's similar or opposing views.

Content of Articles

Article Sample

Sampling articles from the statehouse beat allowed the researcher to look at reporters' reliance on official sources and the opportunities reporters allow ordinary citizens, alternative political groups, and other "non-traditional" sources to surface in news articles. (Articles from the two reporters who participated in a pilot test interview and survey also were sampled and coded during coder training.)

Using a starting publication date of January 1, 1995, the researcher searched library hard copies of each newspaper where a specific reporter worked. When the first article with only that reporter's byline was found, that article was selected for the study. The researcher continued the search, but skipped the second article found, collected the third article, skipped the fourth, and so on, until 30 to 40 articles had been gathered. (If more than one article appeared on the same day by the same reporter, the first article

spotted was chosen.) When 40 articles had been collected for a reporter, 30 were randomly chosen for analysis by selecting the one on the top of the pile, skipping the next, and repeating until 30 were selected. This second wave of randomizing was not carried out for all reporters; one reporter only wrote 17 articles in the last five years; another reporter worked on special projects and had not written 40 articles during the time of data collection in 1995. For reporters whose newspapers can be found in a computer database, the search extended back into 1994 so a total of 40 articles could be collected for each. This double-random selection process was done much more easily by using each reporter's index of stories in the Washington Post Index for the two Post reporters who participated in the study.

Content Analysis

The content analysis of articles was designed to measure five items. These items are: type of article, subject of article, type of source, source frequency, and source repertoire.

The recording instrument allowed each article to be coded for the reporter's case number, the newspaper name, the publication date, the number of paragraphs, the coder's name, the type of story, the subject, the number of each type of source quoted, the order in which sources were mentioned by quotation or paraphrase, and the frequency with which a source was mentioned. The 26 possible source types constructed were developed to represent typical sources to be found in statehouse news coverage.

The type of article sampled included hard news, features, news analysis, and news brief. This information was measured because it may correlate with the number of sources used; feature articles usually are longer in length than news articles or news briefs. If a preponderance of feature articles were sampled for one reporter, that would affect the source/paragraph ratio. The number of paragraphs was coded for each article so the use of sources could be averaged across length of article, rather than per article. This accounts for longer articles running in larger newspapers, such as the Philadelphia Inquirer, which have more news space than smaller papers, such as the Star Democrat.

The subject of article was coded to compare with a reporter's topic preferences and to measure whether the subject of articles affected a reporter's source repertoire. For example, if a reporter wrote articles regarding all eight subject categories yet used the same sources regardless of subject, it may produce a small source repertoire. A plurality of articles came from each of the subjects of crime and prisons, finances, and elections.

The Source Importance variable is measured by the number of times a source or source type appears first in an article. According to journalistic practice, the most important items in a news article usually are placed in the beginning. This style is referred to as the inverted pyramid. Sources who land in the top of the inverted pyramid more frequently have a higher rating of Source Importance. This is determined by measuring the quotation or paraphrase order in articles.

The variable Source Frequency is measured by the number of times a source or source type appears in all sampled articles written by one reporter. If a reporter has a

preference for quoting or paraphrasing some sources more than others, this would be measured by the Source Frequency variable. However, since diversity of opinion is considered a valuable commodity in newspaper journalism, a high Source Frequency number is not necessarily demonstration of good journalistic technique.

While the Source Importance and Source Frequency variables measure how individual sources are used, they can be combined to produce a variable measuring the reporter's Source Repertoire. The Source Repertoire is considered a regular staple of a reporter's most frequently used and highly valued sources that turn up in print. (Others may never be named in print and thus elude the Source Repertoire measure.) With a smaller Source Repertoire used by one reporter, one would expect a narrower picture of the news to be presented in articles written by that reporter. On the other hand, with a larger Source Repertoire used by one reporter, one would expect a broader picture presented in articles produced by that reporter.

The types of sources included in each reporter's Source Repertoire may show a preference for political orientation or other points of view. To determine a reporter's preference for source usage, some of the source types used will be compared and contrasted. For instance, the number of Democratic sources used will be compared with the number of Republican sources used. The Source Repertoire will be analyzed in a subsequent study.

Each article was coded by the researcher (for a total of 714) or one of three other coders (who each coded 50 articles) for use of 26 possible source types for a total sample of 864 articles.

Reliability

A reliability measure was gathered for 114 articles (13 percent) that were double-coded by four other graduate students. Of the 26 possible source types, 14 were found to have a reliability measure of at least .65 using Krippendorff's Alpha. Those source types are: Republican Governor, Democratic Governor, Republican Legislator, Democratic Legislator, Democratic Governor's Staff, Other Legislative Staff, Government Employee, Republican Spokesman, Democratic Spokesman, Community Organization Representative, Lobbyist, Union Representative, Other Democratic Political Official, and Democratic Political Insider. (See Table 3-1.) Additionally, Number of Paragraphs was found to be reliable at .96; Type of Article (.20) and Subject (.46) were not reliable.

Content Concepts

Articles were analyzed to determine how sources were used by reporters. The selection and use of sources is an opportune way to analyze a reporter's perception of an issue. For instance, it is accepted journalistic practice (a convention) that the most important item in a newspaper article goes at the beginning of an article, usually in the first three paragraphs (Data regarding source prominence based on placement in an article was examined in a subsequent study: "Use of prominent sources by statehouse reporters," Eileen Gilligan, May 1997). This study seeks to determine whether a reporter's political beliefs and orientations are related to the sources that are used in the article.

The "source repertoire" is the group of sources and/or source types that are regularly used by a reporter. On the other hand, source types that are rarely used by a reporter could

be seen to represent a hole or a lack of diversity in a reporter's source repertoire. In this sense, this study seeks to determine individual bias of reporters in their selection and use of sources.

In his book, The News Shapers, Soley (1992) analyzed the use of "expert" sources on television news discussion programs and in some newspaper articles produced by Washington, D.C., reporters. Soley found a small, narrow group of experts who were utilized repeatedly by these news organizations. While he labeled these experts "news shapers," some journalists referred to them as members of the "golden rolodex." While Soley found an elite group of experts that Washington, D.C., journalists turn to most frequently, this study seeks to determine whether individual newspaper reporters on separate statehouse beats develop their own "source repertoires" of individuals and source types that they use most frequently in the news production process, and what the diversity of those source repertoires would be.

Analysis Strategy

Multiple regression was used to evaluate the relative predictive strength of various reporter variables regarding source usage. The student's t-test was used to determine the statistical significance of differences in source usage among reporters. The nonparametric Mann-Whitney *U* test also was used post-hoc to determine the statistical significance of differences in source usage among reporters.

Table 3-1

Intercoder Reliability of Source Types using Krippendorff's Alpha

Variable	Krippendorff's alpha	Variable	Krippendorff's alpha
Republican Governor	.65	Democratic Governor	.88
Republican Legislator	.77	Democratic Legislator	.77
Repub. Gov's Staff	-.01	Dem. Gov's Staff	.85
Repub. Legis. Staff	.49	Dem. Legis. Staff	.00
Other Legis. Staff	.67	Gov't Employee	.72
Repub. Spokesman	.79	Dem. Spokesman	.91
Other Spokesman	.61	Ordinary Citizen	-.02
Community Org. Rep	.81	Lobbyist	.95
Business Rep.	.57	Labor/Union Rep.	1.00
Other Repub. Official	.56	Other Dem. Official	.68
Other Political Official	.53	Repub. Pol. Insider	Blank
Dem. Pol. Insider	1.00	Other Pol. Insider	.00
Anonymous	.52	Other	.58

This table shows the intercoder reliability measurement for the frequency of each source type. (The variables measuring the order in which sources were quoted within a story and the total number of quotations for each source in a story were not used in this study.)

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of several multiple regressions and t-tests performed to determine any influence reporters' personal orientations may have on their source usage. Reporter variables come from the questionnaire and surveys completed by the 28 reporters in the sample. Source variables come from the content analysis of 864 articles, 30 articles from each of the 28 reporters.

The results of this study that are based on the reporter unit of analysis should be approached with some caution. The sample size ($N=28$) is relatively small due to the fact that a separate sample of news stories was analyzed to create the content variables for each reporter. The sample size also was kept small due to the geographic obstacles in attaining statehouse reporters from additional states as well as their articles that were located in libraries in those states. The limited sample size produces a low level of power and thus raises the potential for Type II error. As such, results of hypothesis tests using the reporter as the unit of analysis should be viewed as preliminary. For hypotheses based on the story unit of analysis, the 864 article sample provides much greater power.

This chapter begins with some descriptive information from the reporter sample; the most interesting demographics, background information, and beliefs of reporters

based on their answers to the survey questions are reported below and in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. Some of these frequencies will be used in analyzing data from the content analysis of the articles. Seventy-five percent (21) of the 28 reporters were college graduates; 7% (2) were high school grads; 14% (4) had master's degrees; and 4% (1) had a law degree. Fifty-four percent (15) of the 28 reporters reporters majored in journalism. Regarding their political affiliation, 54% (15) of the reporters were Democrats, 29% (8) were Republican, 11% (3) belonged to other parties, and 7% (2) did not answer the question. (Percentages for political affiliation total 101% due to rounding.)

Table 4.1
Average Years of Reporters' Journalistic Experience

Reporters	Mean (in Years)	Standard Deviation
Career Experience	15	9.98
Years at Current Paper	8	8.15
Years on Statehouse Beat	5.8	6.75

Table 4.2
Average Political Leanings of Reporters

Type of Issues	Mean	Stan. Dev.
Economic	3.8	1.26
Social	2.9	1.17

Political leanings were based on a 7-point scale, where 1 was very conservative and 7 was very liberal; neutral was 4.

Political Orientation of Reporters

Hypothesis IA - Political Orientation and Use of Conservative Sources

This hypothesis predicted that reporters who are more conservative are more likely than liberal reporters to use conservative sources. A political index was created combining reporters' self-ratings of political beliefs on economic issues and on social issues. This political index is a measure of liberalism since the scale goes from Very Conservative = 1 to Very Liberal = 7 (Neutral=4), therefore the hypothesis predicts a negative relationship. A regression was run with the political index as the independent variable and the number of Republican and Business Sources/Paragraph as the dependent variable. The $b = -.05$, $F = .071$, and R^2 was .03, which is not significant at the .05 level (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3
Summary of Regression Analysis - Reporters' Index as Predictor

Dependent Variable	Beta	F	R ²
Repub. & Business Sources/pp	-.05	.071	.03

N=28

Not significant at $p \leq .05$

Hypothesis 1B - Political Orientation and Use of Liberal Sources

This hypothesis predicted that reporters who are more liberal are more likely than conservative reporters to use liberal sources. The political index again was used as the

independent variable in a regression with the dependent variable Number of Democratic and Labor Sources/Paragraph. The $b = -.007$, $F = .0013$, and R^2 was .005, which is not significant at the .05 level (Table 4.4).

The variables Total Number of Democratic and Labor Sources/Paragraph and Total Number of Republican and Business Sources/Paragraph also were run as dependent variables in regressions with reporters' separate answers to the items that made up the political index scale. None of these regressions produced significant results.

Table 4.4
Summary of Regression Analysis - Reporters' Index as Predictor

Dependent Variable	Beta	F	R ²
Democratic & Labor Sources/pp	-.007	.0013	.005

N=28

Not significant at $p \leq .05$

Journalistic Experience of Reporters

Hypothesis 2A - Journalistic Experience and Number of Sources Used

This hypothesis predicted that reporters with more overall journalistic experience would use fewer sources on average in their stories. The reporter sample was divided into two groups: Those who worked five years or less as reporters and those who worked more than five years as reporters. Journalism seems to be a profession for the young and the old. Those who leave the field often check out within the first five years. In 1992, the typical reporter was 34 years old and had 10 years of journalism experience (Weaver &

Wilhoit, 1996, p. 120). Reporters in this study had an average of 15 years' experience in journalism; only three reporters had less than five years' experience in journalism. The dichotomy employed in this analysis was designed to capture differences that may exist between newer reporters and those considered on their way to becoming veterans. Total source usage per paragraph ranged from .0859 to .2333. Regression analysis used these two groups as the independent variable and total sources/paragraph as the dependent variable. The $b = .059$ and $F = .09$ with $p = .766$ (Table 4.5). The R^2 was .003. The hypothesis was not significant at the .05 level. This regression also was run with journalistic experience as a continuous variable, and no significant results were obtained. A nonparametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, was conducted post-hoc and no significant results were obtained. These results indicate that reporters who have worked more than five years as journalists did not use fewer sources on average in their articles. There was no significant difference in the average number of sources reporters used regardless of their experience as journalists.

Table 4.5
Summary of Regression Analysis - Reporters' Experience as Predictor

Dependent Variable	Beta	F	R^2
Total Sources/pp	.059	.09	.003

N=28

Not significant at $p \leq .05$

Hypothesis 2B - Beat Experience and Number of Sources Used

This hypothesis predicted that reporters with more experience on the statehouse beat would use fewer sources on average in their stories. The reporter sample was divided into two groups: Those with two years' or less experience on the statehouse beat and those with more than two years' experience on the statehouse beat. Considering the number of players (politicians) and amount of legislation to learn on the statehouse beat, at least one legislative session is required for a reporter to figure out how things work in practice. A second legislative session allows a reporter to master the process. Often reporters leave this beat before accumulating more experience. In this study, 17 reporters had two or more years' experience on the statehouse beat while 11 reporters had less than two years' experience on this beat. The categories employed here were designed to capture the distinction between the novice statehouse reporter and the experienced statehouse veteran. Total source usage per paragraph ranged from .0859 to .2333. A regression analysis produced $b = .167$, with $F = .744$ and $p = .396$ (Table 4.6). The R^2 was .03. The hypothesis was not significant at the .05 level. This regression also was run with beat experience as a continuous variable, and no significant results were obtained. A nonparametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, was conducted post-hoc and no significant results were obtained. These results indicate that reporters who have worked more than two years on the statehouse beat did not use fewer sources on average in their articles than reporters with less experience on the beat. There was no significant difference in the average number of sources reporters used regardless of their experience on the statehouse beat.

Table 4.6
 Summary of Regression Analysis - Reporters' Beat Experience as Predictor

Dependent Variable	Beta	F	R ²
Total Sources/pp	.167	.744	.003

N=28

Not significant at $p \leq .05$

Another regression was run to determine if total years' journalistic experience was influencing the effects of experience on the statehouse beat. When total years' experience was controlled, the number of years on the beat still was not significant with $b = .27$, $F = .86$, and $p = .36$. The R^2 was .03. Perhaps with more experience on the beat, reporters branch out to find sources in a variety of places, which were not easily coded.

Hypothesis 2C - Education and Number of Sources Used

This hypothesis predicted that reporters who graduated from journalism schools or with journalism or communication majors in college would use fewer sources than reporters who were not educated as journalists. The reporters sample was divided into two groups for an independent t-test using the variable Total Sources/ Paragraph. The result was not significant with $t = .26$ and $p = .796$, $df = 26$ (Table 4.7). A nonparametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, was conducted post-hoc and no significant results were obtained. No difference in source usage was found between reporters with journalism degrees and those who learned on-the-job.

Table 4.7

T-test for the Difference in the Average Number of Sources per Paragraph.

	<u>Journalism Grads</u> (n = 15)		<u>Non-Journalism Grads</u> (n = 13)	
Average # Sources Per Paragraph	.1354	.039 s.d.	.1321	.029 s.d.
	N = 28			
	t = .26, df = 26, p. < .796 Not significant			

Support for the Status Quo

Hypothesis 3A - Use of Government and Non-Government Sources

This hypothesis predicted that reporters would quote more government sources than non-government sources. Sources were divided into two groups based on their connection to government. The reliable government sources were: Republican Governor, Democratic Governor, Republican Legislator, Democratic Legislator, Democratic Governor’s Staff, Other Legislative Staff, Government Employee, Republican Spokesman, and Democratic Spokesman. The reliable non-government sources were: Lobbyist, Organization Representative, and Union Representative. A t-test using these two groups yielded $t = -15.48$ at $p < .001$ with 27 df. This hypothesis was significant at $p < .001$ (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

T-test for the Difference in the Number of Government Sources/Paragraph and the Number of Non-Government Sources/Paragraph

	<u>Government Sources</u>		<u>Non-Government Sources</u>	
Average #/ Paragraph	.1081	.032 s.d.	.0151	.009 s.d.
	N = 28			
	$t = 15.48, df = 27, p. < .001$ Significant			

Hypothesis 3B - Use of Business and Labor Sources

This hypothesis predicted that reporters would quote more sources with business connections than sources connected with unions, labor movements, or community non-profit organizations. The source type for business is Business Representative. Sources that fit the labor category were Union Representative and Organization Representative. A one-tailed t-test using these two groups yielded a $t = -1.74$ and $p = .05$ with 27 df, which is significant (Table 4.9). This hypothesis was supported in the opposite direction than predicted: Reporters quoted more labor and community organization representatives than business representatives. However, these results should be considered skeptically since the Business Representative source category was not found to be reliable.

Table 4.9

T-test for the Difference in Business and Labor Sources Used per Paragraph.

	<u>Business sources</u> (n = 28)		<u>Labor sources</u> (n = 28)	
Source Type Per Paragraph	.0087	.008 s.d.	.0127	.009 s.d.
	N = 28			
	$t = -1.74, df = 27, p. = .05$ Significant			

NB: Business Representative source type was not found to be coded reliably.

Hypothesis 3C - Political Affiliation of Sources Used

This hypothesis predicted that reporters would quote more sources from the political party in power than sources belonging to the political party in the minority. The political party in power for each state was determined by the party of the governor. Since the governor often sets the legislative agenda by sending down budget and other legislative packages early in the legislative session, the governor may be seen as driving the legislative process; the legislature often reacts to or follows the governor's lead. As a result, the governor and his or her party are the party in power.

The reporters sample was divided into two groups: those who worked in a state with a Republican governor (Pennsylvania and New Jersey) and those who worked in a state with a Democratic governor (Delaware and Maryland). A t-test was done for these two groups considering the Number of Democratic Sources/Paragraph. The t-value was 1.71 with 26 df and $p = .05$, which is significant (Table 4.10a).

Using those same two samples of reporters based on the governor of each state, another t-test was run using Number of Republican Sources/Paragraph. The t-value was -3.27 with 26 df and $p = .003$, which is significant (Table 4.10b).

Next a ratio of Republican sources/total paragraphs to the total number of political sources/total paragraphs (Republican + Democratic sources) was created for each reporter. Using the same two samples of reporters (based on governor's political party), a t-test was conducted using the new ratio of political sources. The t-value was -5.31, df = 26, and $p < .001$, which is significant (Table 4.10c).

Table 4.10a

T-test for the Difference in Number of Democratic Sources Used per Paragraph

	<u>Democratic Governor</u> (n = 9)		<u>Republican Governor</u> (n = 19)	
Democratic Sources Per Paragraph	.0709	.031 s.d.	.0415	.047 s.d.

N = 28

$t = 1.71, df = 26, p. = .05$ Significant

Table 4.10b

T-test for the Difference in Number of Republican Sources Used per Paragraph

	<u>Democratic Governor</u> (n = 9)		<u>Republican Governor</u> (n = 19)	
Republican Sources Per Paragraph	.0241	.012 s.d.	.0499	.022 s.d.

N = 28

$t = -3.27, df = 26, p. = .003$ Significant

Table 4.10c

T-test for the Difference in Ratio of Republican Sources per Total Political Sources per Paragraph

	<u>Democratic Governor</u> (n=9)		<u>Republican Governor</u> (n=19)	
<u>Rep. Sources</u> Dem + Rep. Sources/Para.	.2648	.117 s.d.	.5876	.163 s.d.

N = 28

$t = -5.31, df = 26, p. < .001$ Significant

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This study set out to uncover any connections between reporters' personal characteristics and political orientations and their source usage. The strengths are:

- (1) Empirically testing reporters' source usage using content analysis and quantitatively looking at the reporter on the individual level of analysis;
- (2) Combining personal interviews (using the questionnaire), surveys, and content analysis to link both sides of the reporter-article equation;
- (3) Focusing on a specialized set of reporters and how they may differ from the average reporter in work, routines, expectations, etc.; and
- (4) Including reporters from four statehouses who represent a range of different size newspapers that circulate in five states and some nationwide.

INTERPRETING RESULTS

Based on the literature using qualitative and personal observational methods, in addition to anecdotal evidence, some influence was expected between reporters' predilections and the sources they used in their articles. The point was to test empirically those expectations using content analysis. However, no relationships were found.

Hypotheses 1A and 1B, which predicted that reporters' politics would lead to greater use

of sources holding similar beliefs, were not significant. In addition, reporters' career length (Hypothesis 2A), experience on the beat (Hypothesis 2B), and type of journalism education (Hypothesis 2C) did not lead to a significant relationship with source usage. The low power of this study may be a large factor in not finding a significant relationship. On the other hand, it suggests that if there is a relationship between reporters' personal orientations and source usage, the relationship is not large or it would have been found even with low power. Contrary to popular belief, this analysis shows that reporters, in a small sample, did not let their personal orientations guide their use of sources in state government reporting.

In personal interviews, however, reporters indicated they supported some of those notions, particularly regarding experience on the job. Asked "Do you use different sources today than you did when you started out in reporting?", many reporters answered affirmatively, explaining that experience -- on the beat and as a reporter -- helped shape their abilities to cull new sources and where they would search. Reporters described the pros and cons of source usage while gaining experience working the same beat. "After a long time on a beat, (you) could develop a pattern. (You) have to be deliberate to break out of the pattern" to find other voices, noted one reporter in his ninth year in the statehouse. Another veteran statehouse reporter offered a similar view. "By now in my case, it's just sort of a routine thing. Obviously, I use the sources that I feel the most comfortable with. It's just a function of there's not a lot of sorting out to do." Yet one reporter with 15 years' experience said sourcing never really changes: "There are a lot of

fundamentals that you go about. Those have remained pretty constant throughout my ‘career’.” Another senior statehouse reporter said finding sources “takes time, knowing the beat, and in knowing shortcuts.” One Pennsylvania reporter said his source repertoire expanded as he switched beats and moved into the capitol; like others, he noted a geographic shift in source usage, although he held onto his sources from his newspaper’s hometown circulation area.

One reporter of two decades described the growth process more explicitly:

The distance that one travels when you start out in this business is incredible. When you start out, you are like a puppy. You just pad around and pee all over the place. You want to have an impact and be important. It’s easy as a 24- and 25-year-old. It’s a dangerous time for new reporters, particularly if they don’t have good editors. By the nature of things, you have to rely on official sources.

Now, I just know so many people in this process that I almost never rely on official sources. It’s very rare that I go to a news conference because I have come to believe that there ain’t no news at a news conference with the exception of the governor ... You have to go (for the governor), but there isn’t going to be any news.

Reporters described a shift in their source usage from obvious political sources to sources with more behind-the-scenes information and more highly placed sources.

“Really, it’s a relationship, a kind of trust that you develop over time . . . I think it really is a matter of time and experience,” one veteran Pennsylvania reporter said. A Delaware reporter also found the key to be trust. “The past sources are the ones that trust me not to screw them. And there’s a mutual trust there: I trust them not to lie to me and they trust me not to abuse the access, shall we say.” Choosing among sources is no longer a conscious decision, according to that same Delaware reporter. “Like most reporters, I

like to use the people who express themselves the best, which is picking the cream of the crop there, which sometimes may be unfair. But then I try to balance that. It's second nature. I don't really think about what I do."

Reporters unanimously noted one basis for deciding which sources to use: good quotes. As one Maryland reporter explained, "(You use) the ones who give the most interesting and original quotes. Sometimes when you have finished your interviews, you will go back and interview other people because you don't have a good quote yet."

The remaining hypotheses in this study speak less to personal orientations of reporters than to a professional predilection: support of the status quo and/or those in power. Previous quantitative and qualitative evidence for reporters' greater use of government sources instead of non-government sources was confirmed. Hypothesis 3A was supported; a significant relationship was found for using more government sources than non-government sources in the average article. As the Maryland reporter mentioned above put it, "There are standard government sources who are going to be the people that anyone points you in the direction of." Although this may seem like an obvious effect to find in state government stories, it is worth replicating considering that Sigal's (1973) seminal work is based on evidence from three decades ago. Since that time, newspapers have made a push to develop more stories including points of view of the "average citizen" as well as other non-government sources (sometimes referred to as source diversity), such as community organizations (Rosen, 1996). One reporter with 26 years' experience noted, "There's a trend to try to get a better mix of non-governmental people

... people who are actually going to be affected by what's being done. And it's a real pain in the butt -- Half the time they haven't a clue what's going on." Despite this emphasis on getting more "ordinary citizens" into the news pages, institutional sources maintained a greater presence and one that is statistically significant.

It should be noted, however, that more government source types were coded reliably than non-government source types (including the "ordinary citizen" source type). But consider that many of the source types not found to be reliable had few if any appearances in the double-coded sample. It is a confounding Catch-22: If there had been more examples of Ordinary Citizens in the sample, that source type may have been reliably coded. Or if there had been more examples of Ordinary Citizens in the sample, coders would have been able to more easily identify them, thereby leading to a reliable coding. For now, the ordinary citizen remains elusive in this sample.

Hypothesis 3B, which predicted that reporters would use more business sources than non-business sources, was not supported, although a surprising significant relationship was found in the opposite direction. These results should be regarded with some skepticism, however, since the Business Representative source type was not coded reliably. Part of the difficulty in coding the Business Representative source type may be that coders had to recognize a business name or label and realize the source should be coded as a business; unlike legislators who must always be identified with their official title, for example, business representatives are not usually identified in articles as a "business" source type, per se. In confusion, coders may have chosen the "Other"

category, thereby reducing the potential for a reliable “Business Representative” source type.

Another reason for this finding may be that labor and community organizations produced more sources than the single source type business. Perhaps reporters are reaching out to more non-traditional source types, especially community organization representatives, in an effort to represent more of their readership in news articles. While it may be more difficult for statehouse reporters to physically find ordinary citizens to comment in articles, community organizations that send representatives to the state capitol make it easier for reporters to find and use them. Labor, like businesses through the local Chamber of Commerce, traditionally is represented by official lobbyists for area unions, such as AFSCME. This result also could be interpreted as demonstrating that business interests do not have a commanding presence in the arena of state government where they are often thought to be powerful, especially via their campaign contributions during election years. Or perhaps business interests try to avoid the spotlight by staying out of the pages of state government news.

When reporters were divided into two groups based on political leadership -- those who worked in states with Republican governors and those with Democratic governors -- three significant relationships were found (Hypothesis 4). In articles about state government in states with Democratic governors, more Democratic sources were used. In articles about state government in states with Republican governors, more Republican sources were used. Thirdly, in states with Republican governors, when

considering the total number of political sources used by those reporters, the ratio of Republican to total political sources (Republican + Democratic) was significant. This demonstrates that more sources were used from the party of the governor than the other major political party in a state. This could be interpreted as a lack of balance in political reporting. Sources from the governor's party were not balanced with sources from the other major political camp. It also could be interpreted that reporters do not feel the need to balance the governor's prominent role as the top political official in a state with comments from the other major political party.

This is an important finding because it gives justification to the power of the incumbency. Not only the governor, but his or her party, receives more source coverage from the regular reporters on their beat. These statehouse reporters, more than any others, should have the easiest access to politicians who could balance sources from the governor's party; yet these reporters chose not to use them in numbers equal to those of the governor's party. This would appear to be an added benefit of publicity for incumbents who try to develop good public ratings and ultimately earn re-election.

In another consideration of sample size, more reporters who participated in this study happened to work in states with Republican governors than Democratic governors, thereby contributing more articles to consider for some hypotheses. The finding in Hypothesis 4 that Republican sources were used significantly more than the total of Democratic and Republican sources (in states with Republican governors) demonstrates

that reporters may give more weight to the information provided by sources in power than those considered out of power.

It is interesting to note that the 14 reporters who worked in Pennsylvania's state capitol made up the greatest plurality in this sample. While the number of their stories in the sample could account for this finding, they were working in a state government where the legislature was ruled by strong Democrats. An equal number -- if not more -- of Democratic sources and Republican sources would be expected if reporters were trying to balance quotes from political sources. Many articles (especially from the *Philadelphia Daily News*) concerned Democratic legislative leaders from Philadelphia, who often were battling Republican legislative leaders or the then-new Republican Gov. Tom Ridge. Yet the number of Republican sources outweighed the Democratic sources used, strongly supporting the prediction that reporters rely on sources in power more than those out of power. One Pennsylvania reporter noted that his job was affected by Ridge's election. "You have a change in parties, you have to develop a whole new network of sources. Now Republican." It follows that perhaps more Democratic sources were used when Democrat Bob Casey was governor of Pennsylvania and both houses were run by Democrats. Also interesting to note is that Ridge's press secretary at the time was a former Pennsylvania statehouse reporter, one of their own, as pointed out by one current reporter. Does that mean he got better press for his boss among his former cronies? That is one influence to consider, although a backlash against a reporter who switched sides, so to speak, might be anticipated as well.

This finding that the majority party's vision may get more press until the minority party manages to gain control is very important when considering the information conveyed to readers in a two-party system of government. Considering that a majority of the reporters surveyed rated themselves as slightly liberal on economic issues and with leanings toward the Democratic Party, it does not appear that reporters' personal political orientations had anything to do with this political bias in the coverage. Instead it may be a function of reporters' routines of coverage that results in members of the leading party receiving more space as sources in news articles than those who are out of power. Of course, it is easier for the pundits to criticize the media for quoting more liberals rather than saying that they quote those maintaining the status quo: the majority party.

Reporters are well aware of the easy criticism that they are too liberal. A recent example of the propagation of this stereotype comes from the April 5, 1997, issue of the Wisconsin State Journal in Madison, Wisconsin. Joyce Nolte, of Madison, writes (in full) in a letter to the editor:

We have taken a Madison paper since our marriage in 1951. We started out with The Capital Times because we were used to an evening paper before we moved to Madison. The Capital Times proved to be too much for our stress level, so we switched to the State Journal, a conservative paper.

For many years now it has been leaning to the left. Each year we wish to cancel but still like a paper to read, so maybe next year.

My suggestion is, please, report news without adjectives trying to swing our opinions. The editorial page is for opinions. It would be nice to have a paper that, if anything, should represent the conservatives. With liberal TV newscasters, Hollywood, etc., we could become a 'spoon-fed' nation.

Interestingly, reporters in this study did not fit the stereotype of liberal reporters. Although on average they were more liberal on economic issues, on social issues they put themselves in the conservative end of the scale. In contrast, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) found that journalists in 1992 on average were more likely to consider themselves Democrats and label themselves left of center rather than middle-of-the-road.

Judging from their answers to the survey question about the political views of *other* reporters, even the 28 reporters in this study believe their colleagues to be more liberal than they think of themselves. While not fitting the stereotype themselves, reporters appear to believe their colleagues fit them. The hypothesis that more Democratic sources were quoted when the Democrats were in power was supported despite any efforts by reporters to dispel the image of working for the more liberal party, the Democratic Party. But reporters should not feel as much pressure to quote Democrats in the minority when Republicans are in the majority because reporters are not criticized for being too conservative (except by more critical forces who note that reporters generally support the status quo in their coverage). One reporter explained, “I try to make sure that the different sides in an issue are reflected. And I try to include one contrarian view ... just to make sure that another side is represented.”

All of these conclusions should be put in perspective considering the methodological limitations of the study. Due to the amount of time, travel, and effort required for interviewing, surveying, and then gathering and coding articles for each reporter in the sample, the sample of 28 has a low power. The number of source types

that were reliably coded could have been higher; unfortunately, several of the source types were not found in any of the 114 articles double coded in the reliability sample. As a result, they were not deemed reliable and were removed from the possible source types for consideration. Several source types were difficult to code as well. For example, “Democratic Insider” may require too much knowledge of the political scene in a state to be reliably coded by a graduate student from another state. Perhaps additional coder training would have increased reliability of source types, too. In addition, although this study only considered human sources, a “document” source type, such as that used by Voakes, Kapfer, Kurpius, and Shano-Yeon Chern (1996), would have added information that demonstrated how often reports, legislation, laws, etc., were cited as sources in state government reporting.

Some of the personal and career information gathered in the survey about the reporters in this sample offers an intimate insight into how reporters in this specialized beat view their jobs. Most importantly, information about the statehouse reporters in this sample contradicts that found by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) in their most recent national sample of reporters. Weaver and Wilhoit found that the average length of stay in a reporting career is 10 years; the statehouse reporters in this sample have an average career length of 15 years, 50% more than that found in The American Journalist. In addition, these reporters averaged six years on the statehouse beat and eight years at their current newspaper, both good signs of longevity in the profession. Weaver and Wilhoit also found that at least 20 percent of the reporters in their sample expected to leave the

profession within five years; this sample did not indicate such expectations. Weaver and Wilhoit found a “serious decline in job satisfaction since 1971 was evident, although a majority of journalists were still at least fairly satisfied with their work in 1992” (1996, p. 121). Reporters in this study seemed to enjoy their jobs. When asked to indicate agreement with the statement “I like my job” on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree, the average was 5.4. More specifically, 43% of reporters indicated they “strongly agreed” with the statement; 54% indicated “agree,” and one (4%) indicated (3) “mildly disagree.” (Percentages total 101% due to rounding.)

This contrast in personal orientation toward the job of reporter points to a ray of hope for reporters; those on specialized beats may be more content with their jobs than those who work on less specialized beats. Weaver and Wilhoit also discuss how autonomy on the job affects reporters’ job satisfaction. This sample’s reporter longevity and greater contentment in the job may be a result of less editorial control in the workplace: All the reporters in this sample were based in and worked out of the state capitol; they do not work in the newsroom where they are under the direct managing eye of their editors. Perhaps this literal distance from the newsroom allows reporters to find more pleasing working conditions or to better determine working conditions more suitable to them. Unlike in the typical newsroom where reporters socialize within their organization, reporters in these capitol bureaus appeared to socialize with reporters from a variety of news organizations but with whom they shared a similar beat. For example, there were discussions of capitol bureau softball teams in Pennsylvania. In Maryland, one

reporter's interview was interrupted by a telephone call from an arch competitor (also included in this sample) who was calling to invite the reporter to an Orioles' baseball game that weekend. In spite of journalistic competition, this widened arena for friendships and socialization among reporters may also contribute to greater on-the-job satisfaction for reporters not based in their home newsrooms.

Another aspect to consider is that for many smaller news organizations, covering the statehouse beat is the top rung. For larger news organizations, it is the next step to a more prestigious beat, such as a national beat in Washington, D.C., for the Philadelphia Inquirer or the Washington Post. Either way, these reporters are considered to be among the best of the bunch. This relatively high job status also may contribute to reporters' satisfaction. Some reporters in the sample clearly had chosen to stay in these beats and make their homes in the state capital city, which should lend another aspect of satisfaction to their careers.

Future Research

Some interesting questions were raised that should be followed up in future studies. Using this data set, the concept of reporter source repertoire should be studied to see if individual reporters relied on particular types of sources more than others. In addition, the notion of source prominence should be pursued to see if reporters quote more prominent sources earlier in articles and place less prominent sources toward the bottom of articles. For instance, when asked "How do you decide which sources to use in an article?" one Pennsylvania reporter covering his second legislative session listed a

source's perspective, an enlightening side to a story, and how well a source can explain an issue. Then he added: "Also whoever's an authority. I always call the governor's office when he's involved ... to check facts ... and to make sure he's covered and he hasn't changed his position." No other political official was mentioned or given such care in that reporter's account. In a similar vein, the number of quotes used from prominent source types could be compared to the number of quotes used from less prominent source types.

Certainly it would prove useful to expand the sample size of this study to increase the power available when examining reporters processes on the individual level. In addition, it would help the representativeness of the sample to include reporters from other parts of the country, such as the West Coast, the South, and the Midwest. However, considering the amount of time (and expense) involved in travel, interviewing, locating articles, and content analyzing them, it may be more feasible to increase the study's size with the help of a group of researchers.

In light of the findings regarding use of sources from each major political party, it would be interesting to follow these reporters through an entire gubernatorial administration and/or to follow these reporters as they cover an administration run by the opposing party. For three of the four states in this study (not Maryland), a back-comparison could be carried out for reporters who had been on the job for at least the end of the previous administration. A comparison of their coverage of an administration and legislature with a governor from one party could be contrasted with their coverage of an

administration and legislature with a governor from the other major political party. For example, both Republican Gov. Christie Todd Whitman of New Jersey and Gov. Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania replaced Democratic governors; Democratic Gov. Tom Carper of Delaware replaced a Republican governor.

Considering the willingness of most reporters invited to participate in the study and to give of their time for the survey and interviews, further research into reporters work and work processes should be encouraged. They seemed willing to talk -- and very willing to talk to a former statehouse reporter. As a group that is rarely asked to speak, they appear to be an untapped reserve of information and insight into a major segment of the news process: how they view and do their job.

This study made headway into the area of news production by demonstrating that: reporters in a small sample did not let their personal orientations guide their selection and use of sources in state government reporting; institutional sources maintained a greater presence and one that is statistically significant among state government news stories; not only the governor, but his or her party, received more source coverage from the regular reporters on the beat; and statehouse reporters as a group were happier and more content with their jobs than the average reporter. Future research should expand on these findings in an attempt to broaden our knowledge about how news workers bring information to their audience.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Reporter Interview & Survey

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Reporter interview & survey

PURPOSE

This research study is interested in how reporters carry out their jobs in gathering information to produce the news. This study is only concerned with reporters, such as you, who cover state legislative news. Approximately 40 statehouse reporters will be asked to participate in this project, which consists of interviews and surveys. First you will be asked 24 mostly open-ended questions about how you do your job; this should take about 30 to 45 minutes. Then you will be asked to answer 18 closed-ended written questions, which should take between 15 and 25 minutes to fill out. You may skip any questions, in either format, that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All of the above information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential. No reporter's name will be used in the results. No identifying information will be revealed about the participants. As a matter of fact, when your interview begins, you may note that the researcher will immediately label notes from your interview and your survey form with a letter and number that will represent you in the study data. Notes from interviews and the survey forms will be stored in locked metal filing cabinets in the Department of Communication. This information will be destroyed by papershredding in the department's office when the study's results are tabulated.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study, and you may discontinue participation at any time prior to the completion of the interview and/or survey. In addition, there are no costs required nor compensation to be received due to participation in this study.

Any questions that you may have concerning this study may be directed to me at the Department of Communication (302/831-8028) or Dr. Costel Denson, chairman of the Human Subjects Review Board at the University of Delaware.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and your refusal to participate or decision to discontinue at any time will result in no penalty.

Dr. Douglas McLeod
Principal Investigator
Department of Communication

I have read the above information and give my consent to participate in this study.

Name

Date

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS FOLLOWING STUDY

August 18, 1995

Dear Reporter,

Thank you for participating in my recent study of statehouse reporters. Your cooperation was greatly appreciated.

This study is concerned with examining how statehouse reporters use sources in newspaper articles. The data collected will be analyzed and results will be forthcoming in the near future. If you would be interested in learning of the results, please feel free to contact me c/o Dr. Doug McLeod, Department of Communication, University of Delaware.

As a reminder, please be assured that all information you furnished in this study will be kept in the strictest confidence. If you have any questions, again, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to help advance research in the social sciences.

Sincerely,

Eileen N. Gilligan
University of Delaware
Department of Communication
250 Pearson Hall
Newark, DE 19716

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