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# Redefining News in the Face of Economic Crises: The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's Transition to a Watchdog Journal

Aras Coskuntuncel

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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REDEFINING NEWS IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC CRISES:  
THE *MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL*'S TRANSITION  
TO A WATCHDOG JOURNAL

by

Aras Coskuntuncel

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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December 2014

ABSTRACT  
REDEFINING NEWS IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC CRISES:  
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by

Aras Coskuntuncel

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014  
Under the Supervision of Professor David S. Allen

In the early 21st century, daily newspapers across the United States struggled with how to respond to economic and technological challenges. This thesis studies one newspaper's response to those challenges. Using ethnographic methods, it explores the *Milwaukee (Wis.) Journal Sentinel*'s transition to a watchdog-centric journal. The thesis suggests that the newspaper responded to economic and technological challenges by redefining news. However, that redefinition brought with it unforeseen problems both in the practice of journalism and the product that journalists produced. The redefinition increased tensions between watchdog and beat reporters, and between older, more experienced journalists and more tech-savvy, younger journalists. The redefinition also put a greater focus on government and its need to establish a villain. As a result of the paper's redefinition of news, the work of journalists became mainly about holding public institutions accountable, even in the cases of wrongdoing in the private sector. The thesis also found that while new technology makes it easier for journalists to engage with their audience, the journalists' ideas about the audience has changed little from what research discovered in previous studies. The thesis suggests that while redefining news to focus on

watchdog-type stories is one attempt to respond to economic challenges, it brings with it challenges for the practice of journalism and for the news that the public receives on a daily basis.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

When the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* produced “Dividing Lines,” an investigative, data-heavy, four-part series on Milwaukee’s political polarization in March and April of 2014, something happened that surprised editors and reporters. Taking advantage of the web-and-mobile-friendly presentation, nearly 50,000 “users,” of whom more than 65 percent were between ages 18 to 34, spent an average of nearly 17 minutes on the stories—more than five times higher than the average. These numbers, paired with more than 100,000 page views, not only demonstrated the hunger for news in the digital era, but also indicated where the future of “traditional” news organizations might lie. These metrics (Graphics 1, 2) were not an accident, nor were the Pulitzer Prizes the paper collected for its investigative reporting. They were rather the results of the paper’s strategy, begun in 2006, to transition into a watchdog-centric journal in response to the industry-wide crises while many others were trimming their investigative reporting.

The worldwide changes in the economy, and the growth of technology in the production, distribution and consumption of news in the last few decades, have not only changed the way newspapers tell stories but also have transformed work and the workplace in news industries. The experience of space and time has changed in both the production and consumption processes of news as those processes have become digitalized. Today, news production and circulation are increasingly shaped by network forces (Ananny and Crawford 2014); social media and crowdsourcing tools are used to collaborate with audiences (Carvin 2013) and to promote stories; programmers,

developers and designers now have a bigger role in news production and more access to news content (Annany 2013, Anderson 2011); and data mining, search engines and tailored algorithms are “increasingly governing the production and circulation of news content, determining its visibility, and organizing news audiences using quantified metrics” (Ananny and Crawford 2014). Overwhelmed by these changes in media, a popular and celebratory discourse started to obscure the continuities between old and new media. Some of these changes helped to deepen and reproduce existing power relations—such as media concentration, electronic surveillance, copyright issues, commodification and commercialization. Moreover, traditional news organizations and television still play an important role as sources of information in people’s daily lives, and the United States is still the main exporter of “popular culture” (Hesmondhalgh 2013). Within newsrooms, more and varied responsibilities have been assigned to news workers while the work force is reduced, and the balance of power in “conceptual activities” has shifted from professional news workers to “managerially controlled technological systems” (Mosco 2009). As traditional forms of journalism change, and as contemporary media face new challenges, news organizations are trying to find their place and redefine themselves.

The *Journal Sentinel* is no exception. In an effort to adapt to new technological and economic conditions, including curbing the effects of dwindling circulation, loss of advertising revenue and high print costs, the *Journal Sentinel* has gone through a series of transformations. In response to these problems, the city’s two newspapers became one, the paper redefined the purpose of its journalism, and it changed the patterns of employment as the newspaper adapted organizationally. “We made a forced choice in the face of the crisis,” said George Stanley, the managing editor of the *Journal Sentinel*,

during our interview in 2013 about the newspaper's recent shift to focus more on watchdog reporting. A historical analysis of the changes and conditions in the industry and the *Journal Sentinel* reveals the role of the changing economy and technology behind the paper's transition, which, in turn, changed the journalists' understanding and the definition of news. The establishment of a separate watchdog unit also created divisions within the newsroom between watchdog and beat reporters. As a result of the growth of technology in news production and circulation, changes in employment patterns in the newsroom created another division between newly hired, tech-savvy, young journalists and veteran news workers. These divisions within the newsroom influence what becomes news and how it is presented, as does the paper's definition of its watchdog role.

Throughout this thesis, investigative journalism refers to in-depth investigations of public and private activities that are not regularly covered by news outlets. It can be more narrowly categorized as watchdog, adversarial or advocacy journalism<sup>1</sup> if the entity that publishes the investigative report pushes for change as a result of the reporting, instead of waiting. Based on my interviews and observations, watchdog journalism for the *Journal Sentinel* comprises unique, data-driven investigative stories that have a clearly identifiable antagonist and that present the opportunity for the newspaper to propose a solution to a problem and build its public-service brand by showcasing work done by highly skilled journalists. But the paper has failed to resist the industry-wide practice of shrinking the newsroom and has used its watchdog branding and the growth of new technologies as an excuse to this end. In addition, it has put the future of its

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<sup>1</sup> Although these terms are used for different types of journalism, similar to Ettema and Glasser (1998), I use these terms interchangeably based on their characteristics of pushing for change and holding organizations, agencies, and governments accountable rather than embracing the press' role as detached, unbiased recorder of facts.

watchdog reporting onto uncertain ground by committing to an acquisition-like merger with E.W. Scripps in July 2014. This thesis studies the *Journal Sentinel*'s transition process from a general-purpose newspaper to a watchdog-centric journal with questions about the future of the industry in mind. And while exploring the institutional and broader economic and social reasons behind the transformation, it analyzes the uses of new technologies and their role before and during the transformation process. In addition, it investigates the implications of this transformation for journalistic work, the workplace and the labor process, and what these processes and changes say about the media's role as a democratizing force. Although a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the changing nature of the news industry, there is not yet research on a news organization undergoing the type of transformation that the *Journal Sentinel* is experiencing. Existing research on news media and their changing nature—especially those done through ethnographic methods—has mainly focused on newsroom and journalistic rituals, looking at everything from news judgment, news gathering and daily rituals in a news organization to the structure of the newsroom (Tuchman 1972; Gans 1980; Berkowitz 1982). Other studies have looked at the changing nature of news itself in the face of new technologies (Robinson 2011; Boczkowski 2010) and the newsroom, as well as the news organization's relationships with its audiences (Bruns 2008; Gans 2004). There is not yet research on a news organization adopting a new type of journalism in order to survive.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review: News, Technology, and Organizational Change**

Although the industry tends to blame the arrival of new technologies in general and the internet in particular for many problems, journalism has been staggering under the weight of profit- and advertisement-driven media operations, professionalization and concentrated ownership. In fact, new technologies also created new possibilities for journalism. The news-for-profit characteristic of market-based journalism raises many problems: Private capitalist control over news media changes the content media companies produce (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 31); standardizes the content (Allen 2005, 55-56) and “marginalizes the voices and interests of the poor and working class” (McChesney 2012, 683); and in turn, serves the special interests of the power elite as these big media companies are “closely interlocked, and have important common interests with other major corporations, banks, and government” (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 14). As a result of market-driven news operations, both the tone and the depth of coverage of working class and lower middle class issues’ changed and the target audience shifted from low-income readers to wealthier demographics (Martin 2008). Moreover, “corporate ideology has become public ideology,” and corporations have “altered the culture of democracy by changing the language and logic that we use to evaluate public life” (Allen 2005, 1). Heavily relying on elite, official sources, the loss of a connection with the reader and their real problems, “adapting the same voice of dull sameness” (Greider 1992), and biased, inaccurate reporting has caused more damage than the emergence of new technologies (Halimi 2009). The common excuse for not being able to create better content or, for example, for cutting investigative reporting, is not solely

related to the arrival of new technologies. The same excuse was being offered when papers were making greater profits.

Today's comments about how the "newspaper business is a dying industry" and is a "dinosaur" on the verge of extinction can be traced to the late 1970s (Bogart 1982), when the professionalization of journalism was on the rise (McChesney 2004). Similar remarks have been made especially since the early 1990s, when rounds of buyouts and layoffs, closures of metropolitan dailies, mergers and acquisitions, and changes in reporting and content, reached a record number. The changes that the *Journal Sentinel* went through during the same period can be summed up in these main categories: the merger of the *Journal* and the *Sentinel* in 1995; the transition into a watchdog-centric paper in the early 2000s; the adoption and use of new technologies; and organizational changes, including those in the advertising and marketing departments. The changes are all intertwined. To adopt new technologies and to change to the new type of journalism, changes in the newsroom's culture and organizational structure were needed. Similarly, changing the organizational structure creates its own challenges that can affect reporting, while these challenges also require the adoption of another set of new technologies. For example, once the newspaper decided to invest more in long-term investigative reporting to distinguish itself from competitors, the organization of the newsroom also had to be changed, new data-mining technologies had to be acquired, new personnel needed to be recruited, and the advertising department had to change its structure and strategies to use the new type of journalism as a selling point. The use of new technologies and new advertising strategies, on the other hand, could also change the way the newspaper tells a story, the tone of an editorial or even employment patterns.

The *Journal Sentinel*'s transformation is influenced by a number of different factors. The transformation has important links to market conditions, the changing role and uses of technology, and the growth of digital "new media" and participatory culture. These influences have in turn shaped notions about the professionalization of journalistic culture and the practice of journalism itself. As a result, I will first review the literature on technology's role in capitalist societies and in the changing nature of news media, with a focus on the digitalization of the markets and telecommunication systems, and what is called the new media. I will also review the related literature in organizational change, professionalization, and the history and development of watchdog reporting and its relationship with the notion of objectivity in journalism.

### **The role of technology and technological change**

As sites of both production and consumption, technologies have multilayered and often contradictory roles and meanings in our social life (Pena 2007). As an area of inquiry, technologies' effects and roles include the production and re-production of power, a means of resistance, and the process of meaning-making by consumers. Innovations and technological systems owe their success not only to the production of goods and the ability to enable the rapid flow of labor and goods, but also to the production of people, in the sense that people also use them to define themselves as individuals (Dinerstein 2003). Technology, according to Marx,

reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations (1990, 493).



In Marx's analysis, technology itself neither determines any particular social outcome nor is it "some free-floating *deus ex machina*" (Harvey 2003, 4). As these relations that Marx mentions are dialectically intertwined and complex, scholarship often falls victim to technological determinism while analyzing them.

Neil Postman (1993) argues that people today are ruled by machines instead of the other way around. Postman contends "all forms of cultural life" are submitted "to the sovereignty of technique and technology" (52). The author defines today's world as a "technopoly" in which "human life must find its meaning in machinery and technique" (52). Perceiving history as a product of technologies, as many determinist scholars have done and are still doing, Postman separates cultures into three main historical types: "tool-using cultures, technocracies and technopolies" (22). Accordingly, tools were invented to satisfy the needs of people in tool-using cultures (23); in technocracies, technology and technological inventions were seen as a remedy to all ills (38); and in technopolies, tradition, culture and human beings are "placed at the disposal of" techniques and technologies (52). Because Postman defines some of the problems of today's widely shared utopian technological determinism from a dystopian technological deterministic perspective, his analysis essentially falls prey to the same fetishism toward technology that he is trying to criticize. In Postman's analysis, technology is autonomous, and new technologies are treated as the internal process of scientific invention that creates new societies and new social relations. Nevertheless, he rightfully complains about how in today's society "the specialized knowledge of the masters of a new technology" has become "a form of wisdom" (11) and about people's near-religious faith

that new technologies will resolve their problems. This is also the case for newsrooms – knowledge about technology is being substituted for intelligence and wisdom.

But Postman’s deterministic views—as under the heavy influence of post-Cold War, “end of history” trends—lacks some critical components of the issue (like fetishism), and his vague suggestions as solutions to the problem turn his analysis into complaints about the changing world. Raymond Williams’ (2003) analysis of new technologies and technological invention as the product of already existing social processes is essential in turning Postman’s analysis on its head. While Postman, along the lines of Marshall McLuhan (1964), argues that machines make history, Williams rejects all forms of determinism. Regarding the development of television, Williams brings a historical perspective back to the analysis of technology and its role in society. Technology, Williams contends, is “at once an intention and an effect of a particular social order” (132). According to Williams, it is “a characteristic of the communications systems that all were foreseen—not in utopian but in technical ways—before the crucial components of the developed systems had been discovered and refined” (14). Analyzing the history of broadcasting technologies, Williams explains the process:

The decisive and earlier transformation of industrial production, and its new social forms, which had grown out of a long history of capital accumulation and working technical improvements, created new needs but also new possibilities, and the communications systems, down to television, were their intrinsic outcome (12).

Moreover, according to Williams, the priorities of “real decision-making groups” are the determining factor in the development of a new technology in response to a social need (12, 13). Technology then does not create history; instead, history is driven by such “human things” as social, political and economic intentions, interests, struggle,

cooperation, and competition. Whether on the macro—or institutional—level, an analysis of the technological change and the uses of new technologies, then, should include the analysis of these “human things,” and the continuations and changes in the power relations.

While some scholars emphasize the continuities between old and new media and how the uses of the new technologies have deepened and extended capitalistic control (Schiller 2007; McChesney 2007; Andrejevic 2009), others have focused on the discontinuities and departures (Hardt and Negri 2000; Ross 2004; Dyer-Witheford 1999) in power relations. The relationship between technological change and control is one of the main themes not only for economic markets in general but also for the news industry.

With information becoming increasingly commodified and its importance to capitalist production since World War II only growing, Beniger (1986) tries to grasp the major changes in economy and society, when theories of “postindustrial society” or “information society” were prominent. Beniger starts with a set of questions: Why have information and computers become so central to modern society, and why now? He answers these questions with the concept of the “control revolution” (vi), “a complex of rapid changes in the technological and economic arrangements by which information is collected, stored, processed, and communicated, and through which formal or programmed decisions might effect societal control” (427). According to Beninger, “control revolution” is the response to the crisis of control caused by the industrial revolution, which speeded up “a society’s entire material processing system” (vii). Beniger describes the “control revolution” not only as rapid changes in technology but also as a representation of “the beginning of a restoration—although with increasing

centralization—of the economic and political control that was lost at more local levels of society during the industrial revolution” (7). Bureaucracy and its computerization, says Beniger, is the most important control technology “for the control of the societal forces unleashed by the industrial revolution” (6). Beniger defines control in “its most general definition, purposive influence toward a predetermined goal” (7). New information technologies, says Beniger, are not only used to control production, distribution and consumption of goods and services by the private sector, but also “their potential for controlling systems at the national and world level was not overlooked by government” (20). According to Beniger, “information processing, communication, and control” is central to “all aspects of human society and social behavior” (436). Beniger’s concepts of “control” and the “restoration of control” are also useful when it comes to investing heavily in and adopting new technologies in the production, distribution and consumption of news. While new technologies cheapened the production, distribution and consumption of news, they simultaneously damaged institutional control over it during the early- and mid-1990s. This initial environment later gave way to efforts to restore corporate control. The market and corporations turned to new technologies themselves to regain control. Heavily investing in these new technologies meant investing in pro-corporate legal regulations (copyright, privatizations, etc.) to exploit new digital technologies’ potential to control and create not only production sites but also new consumer markets (surveillance, free labor, re-establishment of flexible working hours, etc.) on the global level. All of these in return legitimized news companies’ actions to reduce employment, replace workers, and break unions’ power and influence in the newsroom. Although Beniger’s concept of “control revolution” as a response to the crises

caused by the unprecedented speed in production and distribution after the industrial revolution is thought-provoking not only on a macro level but also at the organizational level, his analysis lacks the political economy of “control” in society. It is not clear who controls what or whom and why.

Dan Schiller (2007) explains the process of the commodification of information and the importance of information technologies and sectors in today’s economy by asking a set of questions similar to those asked by Beniger: Why was there a “computer revolution”? Why in the postwar era? Rejecting “postindustrial society” or “information society” theories and arguments that “information itself had become the transforming resource of social organization” (6), Schiller asks, “What if, however, we suppose that information is not inherently valuable?” According to Schiller, a key distinction between “information as a source and information as a commodity” is necessary “to grasp the nature of information in contemporary society” (8). While a source is something of actual or potential use, Schiller explains, “only under particular conditions can they be transformed into commodities” (8). Like all other sources claimed by capitalism, production and the use of information, sources “are all produced increasingly by wage labor within and for a market” (8). Turning to Marx’s analysis of commodity, Schiller concludes that once a “peripheral phenomena,” information-intensive activities now “have become profoundly important” for capitalist production and distribution and, quoting Marx, are a result of “the historically expanding arena of capitalist production” (11).

Schiller (1999) questions the technological deterministic view of new technologies' inherent ability to change power relations in society by analyzing the history of the internet from the political economy perspective. According to Schiller,

Knowledge carried through the internet is no less shaped by social forces than it is elsewhere. Far from delivering us into a high-tech Eden, in fact, cyberspace itself is being rapidly colonized by the familiar workings of the market system. ... Indeed, the internet comprises nothing less than the central production and control apparatus of an increasingly supranational market system (xiv).

He explains why he refers to the contemporary epoch as “digital capitalism”: “Networks are directly generalizing the social and cultural range of the capitalist economy as never before” (xiv). He shows how the development of the internet and the greater telecommunication systems were subjected to neoliberal<sup>2</sup> and market-driven policies and how governments and organizations like the World Trade Organization ensured regulations and policies that favored corporate interests, while corporations realized and bankrolled the new systems' possibilities to move their production to cheaper labor markets and develop worldwide consumer markets (12-90). Schiller puts the politics of “control” in a historical context, which Beniger lacked, and concludes that “digital capitalism has strengthened, rather than banished, the age-old scourges of the market system: inequality and domination” (209).

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<sup>2</sup> The term “neoliberalism” often is used excessively and inconsistently. Both Schiller and I use the term in order to explain the common political-economic practice of deregulation, privatization and marketization meaning both the withdrawal of the state from many areas and the creation of the markets by state action if markets do not exist (water, social security, telecommunications, etc.) since the 1970s. For a detailed discussion of neoliberalism, see: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

## **New media, surveillance, and control**

The commodification of information paired with the colonization of cyberspace by the market system creates the essence of today's hypersurveillance environment. As Emily Nussbaum points out (2007), today

every street in New York has a surveillance camera. Each time you swipe your debit card at Duane Reade or use your MetroCard, that transaction is tracked. Your employer owns your e-mails. The NSA owns your phone calls. Your life is being lived in public whether you choose to acknowledge it or not (Nussbaum 2007, 24).

This is what David Lyon calls "the surveillance society" (1998, 3). According to Lyon, from making a phone call to withdrawing money from an ATM, we leave electronic footprints, which are stored and processed by computer databases that belong to big corporations and government agencies (1998, 5). Analyzing surveillance as an aspect of the struggle between labor and capital, Lyon contends that commercial surveillance is bound to social control as an extension of workplace management. While the progressive potential of new technologies is often celebrated—as if this potential has already been realized—the asymmetric surveillance, control and free labor aspects ruled by commodity capitalism are largely being ignored. The core of the argument is that old media were "top-down," "one-way" and "authoritarian," and therefore did nothing but reproduce existing power and social relations. Thanks to interactive, participatory "new media," audiences are now "seizing the reins of the global media"; they don't just watch but create content (Grossman 2006). This is essentially the same everything-has-changed rhetoric that is used by what Thomas Streeter calls "the discourse of the new technologies" (1997, 222) when it comes to the revolutionary promise of a new technology. "Such speculations," says Streeter, "naively assumed that

telecommunications could magically resolve the power relations among people. . . .” This discourse assumes that “technology could solve problems humans created rather than the other way around” (1997, 227-228). As Darin Barney rightly emphasizes, “[I]f this is true—if network technology is inherently revolutionary—it leads one to wonder why existing governmental, bureaucratic, corporate, and financial elites are so enthusiastic about, and so heavily invested in, the success of this technology” (2000, 19). Ultimately, they were the same corporate powers that were behind traditional mass media, which the enthusiastic supporters of this so-called revolution accuse of being propagandist and anti-democratic. As Mark Andrejevic notes, the determining factor is, despite the “revolutionary promise of participatory media, . . . power relations remain largely unaltered” (2009, 1).

According to Foucault, power does not “function in the form of a chain . . . power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (1980, 98). And where there is power there is also always resistance (Foucault 1978). What these variants of the digital-democracy discourse are missing is not only an analysis of the changes and continuations of the power relations behind new technologies but also the power/resistance dialectic that existed in the “old media” era. The sharp contrast between critical interactivity and passive consumption related to the old and new media is shallow and “misleading” (Andrejevic 2009). As Barney (2008) and Jonathan Sterne (2012) argue, the commercial characteristics of active participation may very well lead to a new kind of passivity that neglects critical political thinking and engagement. All existing governmental, financial, bureaucratic and corporate circles insistently, and sometimes coercively, demand that citizens participate in a digital world that is increasingly



becoming a place for controlled marketing experiments “to determine how best” to influence the consumer (Andrejevic 2009). Information in the digital age—both the content produced by the users of digital media and the personal information that is being collected by companies via asymmetric and nontransparent monitoring—is an important source of value in market exchange. In other words, users produce value-generating information by being monitored and by creating content just to get, for example, a “free” email account and assistance to keep in touch with friends. The source of economic value that is being used in the market is there, but it is not being produced by wage labor; this is what Tiziana Terranova (2000) calls “free labor” or what Andrejevic (2002) calls “the work of being watched” (Terranova 2000; Andrejevic 2002). Using Foucault’s ideas about Panopticism, in which “the work of being watched” is conceived as a form of labor, Andrejevic concludes that “the real power of surveillance” is one that is “relentlessly productive and stimulating” (2002, 234). “The Panopticon,” says Foucault, “has a role of amplification; although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and effective, it does so not for power itself. . . its aim is to strengthen the social forces—to increase production, to develop the economy. . . to increase and multiply” (1977, 208). This is the kind of power that “attracts the interest and the capital of the online economy” (Andrejevic 2002, 235). The ownership and control of networks, the means of monitoring and data warehouses are important because information is an important source of value, and in this context, media mogul Rupert Murdoch’s announcement of “power to the people” is meaningful while purchasing Myspace, which is supposed to be one of the means of citizen empowerment. The enclosure of cyberspace by a few powerful companies via copyright has become another opportunity for business

to tighten and reproduce its control over media production as capturing productive resources means setting and controlling the terms of access to them (Terranova 2000, Bettig and Hall 2003).

Manuel Castells (2004), while similarly contending that the system we live in today is dominated by the networks of global power that re-produces social control, argues that these same networks can also enable the formation of alternative networks. Ron English, et al., (2004) also point out the alternative use of technological networks. The authors contend that technologies that benefit corporate and political elites can also be used to facilitate “critique, resistance, and outright revolt” (vii). Nevertheless, it is important to analyze the dialectic relationship between power and resistance. As Andrejevic points out, “In the interactive era, it is perhaps time to turn Foucault on his head: . . . where there is resistance there are always new and realigned strategies for control” (2009, 41).

While Williams (2003) provides a critique of technological determinism in the context of the history of television, Harvey (2003) does it in the context of the workings of capitalist production. According to Harvey, the reason technology and technological innovations are widely seen as a remedy to all ills (especially by decision-makers and interest groups) and are being heavily invested in is partly because we are “blinded by fetish beliefs” (3). What Harvey calls the “fetishism of technology” is endowing technologies “with powers they don’t have (e.g., the ability to solve social problems, to keep the economy vibrant, or to provide us with a superior life)” (3). Analyzing Marx’s description of technology, Harvey explains how Marx places technology “at the nexus between the material reproduction of daily life, our relationship to nature, our social

relations, and our mental conceptions of the world” (4), and emphasizes the importance of understanding the dialectically intertwined relationship between these elements. Based on Marx’s explanation of how in a perfect market, superior technology can be a source of excess profits for capitalists for a while, Harvey points out the difference between seeing the machines themselves as a source of value, which is fetishistic, and understanding that “profit arises out of the social relation between capital and labor” (7). Marx’s concept of “coercive laws of competitions,” according to Harvey, not only produces the fetishistic belief in technology but also explains the

technological dynamism of capitalism vis-à-vis other social systems. . . .  
 Capitalist entrepreneurs and corporations innovate not because they want to but because they have to in order to either acquire (like Bill Gates or Steve Jobs) or retain (like General Motors) their status as capitalists (7).

According to Harvey, capitalists’ technological fetishisms are not without goals and impulses. In order to speed up capital circulation and eliminate the barriers confronting capital accumulation, capitalists resort to new technologies: seeking to control the labor process, dominating nature, annihilating space and time, creating consumer markets, and retaining or sustaining a monopoly power over production and marketing. Emphasizing that control over technology is vital for monopolists and oligopolists, Harvey lists three possible ways this control can be achieved: adopting a technology that requires massive amounts of capital so potential competitors can be discouraged from entering the field (Boeing), relying on continuous technological innovation so it is nearly impossible for competitors to catch up (Microsoft), and protecting patent laws and agreements on intellectual property rights both domestically and internationally (the pharmaceutical industry) (21). According to Harvey, it is

perfectly reasonable to argue that new technologies open up all manner of possibilities for, say, democratization via the Internet. It is quite another matter to insist that such outcome is already defined within the new technology itself (23).

He adds that the printing press also opened up possibilities for democratization, but in the hands of media barons, it is more of “a capitalistic tool for political-economic manipulation via commodification and spectacle rather than an instrument of open debate and democratic discussion.” According to Harvey, the dynamics of technological change “take on forms that are both instrumental and fetishized” in relation to controlling labor, dominating nature and expanding consumer markets (24). Nevertheless, no matter how problematic technologies may seem, any approach to combat social injustice or environmental denigration should not rule out these technologies “as potential contributors to the solution” (28).

Harvey’s analysis of the “fetishism of technology” and his interpretation of Marx’s concept of “coercive laws of competitions” are useful in order to understand new newsroom culture, which now substitutes knowledge of technology for intelligence and wisdom, and to understand traditional news organizations’ efforts to regain control over the production, distribution and consumption of news in local and global markets. These analyses are also important to understand the monopolization processes in the news industry.

David Nye, on the other hand, (1994) tries to put technology in a social context from the perspective of how new objects are “interpreted and integrated into the fabric of social life” in the United States (xv). By drawing on Immanuel Kant, Edmund Burke, Perry Miller and Leo Marx’s concepts of sublime, Nye suggests that the experience of awe and wonder, “often tinged with an element of terror,” when confronted with natural

objects—the experience of sublimity—is also valid when confronted with particular manmade objects. In fact, according to Nye, the technological sublime and the obsession with greater technological achievements are the core elements of American culture, which lacks national unity or historical bounds in the sense that Europeans have. As the American public celebrated the longest railroad bridge or the biggest waterfall, “the popular sublime became part of the emergent cultural nationalism. . .” (32). During the nineteenth century, politicians, journalists and businessmen collectively provoked the sense of sublime, and starting in the late nineteenth century, corporate elites transformed the sublime into a consumerist expression. According to Nye, the feeling of awe for technology also created “a belief in national greatness” (43). Nye essentially tries to explain the American version of technological fetishism with the concept of sublime. As a result, his analysis falls short of explaining the class, gender and race differences or dynamics in relation to the experience of sublime. Secondly, it is also hard to believe that the technological sublime is unique to the United States of America.

Rayvon Fouche (2003), on the other hand, argues against the perception of ideal technological minds and systems as white, male and nation builders. Instead, he focuses on financial and expertise support and privileges that the “inventors” historically enjoyed. In addition, Michael Adas (2006) focuses on the importance of technology in imperialism, its “civilizing” mission and “front line” uses in “opening markets,” and winning the hearts and minds of non-Westerners (147). Ruth Oldenziel (1999) also argues against the white and masculine portrayal of technological innovations and systems. She emphasizes professionalization’s role in fields related to technology—for

example, engineering—in excluding skilled mechanics and women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Jurisdictional control and professionalization**

Past historical-sociological analyses of journalism as a profession are limited both in number and content (Dooley 1997a; Hodges 1986; Tuchman 1978) and even less scholarship has applied the sociological analysis of professions and the professionalization process to the analysis of the current issues in journalism. Some studies have investigated the standardization of news content, viewing “the public as a body to be informed and managed rather than activated” (Allen 2005), and the occupational disputes in political communication between journalists and non-journalists (Dooley 1997b). As a special category of occupations, professions and professional groups amass social legitimacy via claiming and controlling certain work tasks; forming and maintaining occupational boundaries; controlling the internal processes (admittance, licensing and punishment); creating and controlling markets for their expertise and/or products; obtaining and maintaining political and/or economic elites’ sponsorship; producing an ideology; and preventing competing groups from entering the field (Abbott 1988; Sarfetti Larson 1977; Dooley 1997a). Moreover, professions have to adapt to the changing technological, political and economic conditions in order to survive and maintain their professional power. An analysis of professionalization of journalism is needed in order to understand the current issues in journalism and the challenges faced by the profession.

The rise and evolution of modern professions is closely tied to the rise of capitalism, the advancement of “science and cognitive rationality” and “progressive

differentiation and rationalization” in the capitalistic social division of labor (Larson 1977). According to Larson, professionalization is the process “by which producers of special services sought to constitute and control a market for their expertise” (1977, xvi). While early scholarly studies emphasize the formation and the accumulation of certain traits like occupational associations, ethics codes, etc., recent scholarship focus on the group struggle and control within the social, economic and political conditions they reside. According to the latter, acquisition, control and manipulation of abstract knowledge is key for professional work, and the struggle over jurisdictional and market control is central to professionalization (Abbott 1988; Larson 1977; Kronus 1976). Although “journalism organizations have been engaged in the professionalization process for a long time” (Allen 2005), journalism’s legitimacy as a profession has always been called into question (Bennett 1988; Chomsky 1991). With the rise of new media technologies and the internet, journalism’s professional power and legitimacy has become more vulnerable to such attacks. The main problem about journalism’s vulnerability as a profession rests in its dependence on “the knowledge systems developed by others” as opposed to some other professions like medicine, which developed their own bodies of abstract knowledge. “Because a comparable body of knowledge has not been developed for journalism, the journalistic occupational group has based its quest for legitimacy on its handling of abstract knowledge from others” (Dooley 1997a). Moreover, work tasks, occupations and professional forms are “cultural and social formations that are subject to redefinition and reconstruction” (Dooley 1997a). According to Abbott (1998), technological, economic, political and social changes can lead to changes in occupational boundaries and work systems.

Abbott (1988) explores the idea of professionalization and theorizes the systematic relations of profession by addressing the following questions: “How do professions develop?” “How do they relate to one another?” “What determines the kind of work they do?” Abbott contends that the history of professions is the history of jurisdictional disputes. Abbott defines professions as “exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular causes” (8). According to Abbott, the content of the work, the ability of abstraction, jurisdictional claim and competition are the key factors in the development of professions. Recognizing the fact that the “control of knowledge and its application means dominating outsiders who attack that control,” Abbott also asks, “Why should there be occupational groups controlling the acquisition and application of various kinds of knowledge?” He argues that “professions develop when jurisdictions became vacant, which may happen because they are newly created or because an earlier tenant has left them altogether or lost its firm grip on them” (3). A jurisdictional claim is central to professional life and vital for professional competition. “In claiming jurisdiction, a profession asks society to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights; jurisdiction not only has a culture, but also a social structure” (57, 59). With the digitalization of the markets and telecommunication systems, traditional news companies’ jurisdictional control over journalism was threatened by various occupational groups in the industry—from bloggers to “citizen” and freelance journalists. To reclaim its professional jurisdiction and restore its control over the production, distribution and consumption processes, news companies tried to differentiate themselves while continually investing in adoption and innovation of new, expensive information technologies. The *Journal Sentinel* saw its future in long-form, investigative



journalism and branded itself as a watchdog journal; its managers explained the decision by stating that they aim to produce news that readers cannot find elsewhere. By investing in expensive, big-data journalism and carving out watchdog journalism as its area of expertise, the *Journal Sentinel* aimed to re-establish control not only in the local news market but also in the newsroom. The paper's justification for the never-ending buyouts and the workload that the rest of the newsroom has to bear was its watchdog mission and the adoption of new, data-driven technologies. Moreover, the paper defines its efforts as a way out of the current crisis in the industry and represents itself as a role model.

Harvey's analysis (2003) of the importance of control over technology and adoption of new technologies for monopolists and oligopolists in capitalist markets; Schiller's analysis of the continuity and deepening of power relations in new media; and Beninger's analysis of "control revolution" are also closely related to jurisdictional control and the reclamation processes for occupational groups. By discouraging competitors from entering the field or making it impossible for them to catch up, adopting new technologies at the same time can contribute to the process of claiming or reclaiming a jurisdiction in a field.

### **Spatialization and organizational change**

The meaning or ideological dimension of media production shouldn't obscure the reality that mass media are "economic entities with both a direct economic role as creators of surplus value through commodity production and exchange and an indirect role, through advertising, in the creation of surplus value within other sectors of commodity production" (Garnham 1979, 132). Systems of commodity production and exchange require spatial organization and movement. These spatial processes, at the same

time, create barriers to the expansion of capital and slow its turnover. “The faster the capital launched into circulation can be recuperated, the greater the profit will be” (Harvey 1991). Thus, capital has a tendency to “annihilate space with time” (Marx 1993, v). While Harvey describes this process as “space-time compression,” Giddens (1990) uses the term “time-space distanciation.” These concepts refer to capitalism’s tendency to use and improve “the means of transportation and communication, to shrink the time it takes to move goods, people, and messages over space” (Mosco 2009). One cannot talk about “space” without invoking “time” (Lefebvre 2009, Giddens 1979) because a “change in the way the former get represented will almost certainly generate some kind of shift in the latter” (Harvey 1991). By speeding up the “turnover time of capital,” capitalism speeds up the pace of economic and social processes. Technical and organizational innovations—both in production and circulation—along with corporate concentration become vital in the process of speeding up the “turnover time of capital.” News organizations—and cultural industries in general—are part of the transition from Fordism to flexible production and accumulation as a result of the time-space compression. The implementation of new technologies in the newsrooms, de-skilling and re-skilling of news workers, changing of the organizational structure, and waves of mergers and acquisitions in the industry should be read through these processes. The capitalistic structuring of newsrooms in terms of Fordist spatial and temporal experiences has meant centralized control of labor and labor-time (deadlines, punch cards, strictly regulated pay for work), and hierarchical newsrooms that are inaccessible to the public but easily monitored by management. Overemphasizing the progressive potentials of new technologies without considering their actual use and the means and conditions of

production—including all cultural products—some contend these space and time experiences have changed so dramatically that the distinction between producers and audiences disappeared since we are living in an “information age” rather than “industrial age” (Jenkins 2006, Robinson 2011). Along with the positive effects of new technologies like increased contact between audience and journalists, the tendencies of control, exploitation and commodification of labor have been deepened and extended. Today, with the arrival of digital technologies, the distinction between work-time and leisure-time has disappeared; corporate and managerial labor monitoring has expanded to out-of-work activities and communications (for example, many news companies, including the *Journal Sentinel*, now require corporate access to employees’ work email accounts and mobile phone data); through deconstruction and reconstruction of labor and assigning more responsibilities, journalists’ work load has intensified; rounds of buyouts and layoffs weakened unions and forced them to make sacrifices on their contracts; and use of cheap and free labor has increased while the hierarchy within the newsroom remains unchanged.

Technological change and its relationship with organizational change is another focal point of research on bureaucratic structure and labor processes. The work of Tuchman (1978), Gans (1980), Fishman (1980) and Deuze (2007) provided rich empirical detail about the amount and nature of the organizational planning and processing used in news production with an emphasis on daily routines, the division of labor and means of administration. According to this research, the autonomous work of journalists is structured by and is a product of bureaucracy and daily routines such as beat assignments, deadlines, story assignments and the notion of objectivity. Journalistic

rituals and routines have an important role in news production and are part of the reason that many journalists function as cogs in an industrial production site rather than as “symbol creators.” This line of research follows Weberian sociology, which focuses more on determining the influence of bureaucracy instead of power relations. Similarly, Burns and Stalker (1966) explored the relationship between the change in technology, markets and management systems based on 20 English and Scottish companies that tried to adopt new electronic technologies in the post-World War II era. They define the two ends of the spectrum of management systems as “mechanistic” and “organic.” The authors define the mechanistic management type as bureaucratic systems in which the interaction between the members is vertical and hierarchic, and roles, rights and responsibilities are precisely defined. According to Burns and Stalker, this type of management is appropriate under relatively stable conditions in terms of economic, political and, most importantly, technological changes. The other end of the spectrum is the organic management type, in which the definitions of roles, rights and obligations are broader and constantly redefined. According to the authors, the organic type of management is less formal and more appropriate under the conditions of rapid technological and market changes. Therefore, the success of the adopted management system depends upon the degree of technological and market change, the internal structure of the institution, and the capabilities of the people in higher positions within the firm. Markus and Robey (1988) identify three conceptions of causal agency “in the literature on information technology and organizational change”: the technological imperative, the organizational imperative, and the emergent perspective.

In the technological imperative, information technology is viewed as a cause of organizational change. In the organizational imperative, the motives and actions

of the designers of information technologies are a cause of organizational change. In the emergent perspective, organizational change emerges from an unpredictable interaction between information technology and its human and organizational users (585).

### **Changing nature of traditional news organizations**

Worldwide changes in the economy, technology and the news industry itself in the last few decades have forced news organizations and the news industry in general to redefine themselves both organizationally and in the work that is done. Boczkowski (2010) analyzes how the adoption and the implementation of new technologies changed news production and the organization of a newsroom. By analyzing leading Argentinian print and online news organizations in terms of newsgathering, production, presentation and audiences, Boczkowski contends that in the digital age, news production and content are homogenized and the commodification of news has brought about news imitation. According to Boczkowski, imitation is not limited to news content; if one news organization adopts a new business strategy to increase revenue and bankroll the digital space, others follow, which is not new or unique to the profession. According to Boczkowski, understanding “the workplace as the main spatial and temporal locus of online news consumption” and the “examination of the work that goes into producing and consuming news stories” are central to understanding imitation in today’s news media (171). Boczkowski’s analysis focuses on how spatial and temporal changes in news consumption led to the changes in news production and content. As people increasingly consume news online and at work, news organizations have re-organized their online news content and presentation accordingly: investing more in hard news/breaking news. He argues that the constant monitoring of competitors and the separation of breaking

news and features, and print and online news within the newsroom produced a decrease in diversity in the news production and among the news content. In terms of the media's role as a democratizing force, Boczkowski's findings (2010) point out the negative effect of the imitation process: Consumers dislike homogenized news and both the public and the journalists feel powerless to alter the situation (168). Moreover, even with the variety of digital tools that provide more feedback and participation, the paper is still far from taking advantage of these tools, and instead uses them to merely measure the clicks and page views that a story amasses. The reasons journalists have little knowledge about the actual audience and are reluctant to try to identify them or take their feedback into account, according to Herbert J. Gans (1980), are closely related with their jurisdictional concerns: "They are reluctant to accept any procedure which casts doubt on their news judgment and their professional autonomy" (232). Journalists try to justify their fear of and distrust for the audience by claiming that "the audience cannot know what it wants" because they weren't at the scene while journalists were covering the story, or they would prefer "gossip about celebrities" (Gans 1980).

In another study that analyzes the new characteristics of news production and the news itself after the arrival of digital technologies, Sue Robinson (2011) concludes that digitalization has altered the labor dynamics of news production and transformed the relationship between the institution and the audience. According to Robinson, a news story today "represents a fluid productive process as opposed to a discrete newspaper article" (141). She describes today's journalism as a "process" in which "conversations have become news content." Robinson suggests that a news story is "forever unfinished" and audience members are actively participating in institutional news production.

Robinson also emphasizes the transformation of the workplace from a print-based structure to an online news site and contends that “for the first time, people outside of the walls of the newsroom had control over information products within the news organization’s website” (196). According to Robinson, interactive technologies opened up the “temporal borders” of the newsroom and the news production process by bringing audiences’ direct input, for example, into the commenting policy (196). Robinson’s overly optimistic study fails to recognize what Boczkowski calls “imitation” and falls short of analyzing technological innovation and the adoption of new technologies in a historical context. The author fails to address the fact that the newspaper she chose to study (Madison, Wisconsin’s *The Capital Times*) actually had to stop its news production at the end of its digitalization process, which she observed, and went from 40 journalists to six who mostly copy and paste news.

In addition to organizational change, the change in journalistic rituals and journalists’ relationship with their audiences, the type of journalism that traditional news organizations do is also changing. As Boczkowski points out in his study (2010), after the arrival of the internet, most newspapers invested in breaking news as they saw opportunities to further cut costs and assumed that this was what their readers wanted. Hence, production of the more expensive and expertise-requiring, long-form, investigative stories started to diminish. Moreover, in a highly competitive environment, “imitating” other institutions’ content and stopping after reporting a problem appeared a safer way to produce news for institutional news outlets.

### **Investigative, long-form reporting**

As James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser point out (1998), journalists, even those who are “designated by other journalists as among the best reporters doing the best reporting,” try to restrain themselves after reporting a problem in a society by not making moral judgments (62). David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit in their studies in the 1980s and 1990s found “only about 20 percent of the journalists surveyed rated ‘adversary of government’ as an ‘extremely important’ role. At the same time, roughly two-thirds of the journalists rated investigation of government claims as an extremely important journalistic function” (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986, 1996). Ettema and Glasser (1998) write that most journalists can be “reluctant” to define their roles as adversarial. Journalists, investigative reporters in particular, have an instinct to see that the people in power who cause “suffering and injustice are held publicly accountable.” It is an instinct that “promises forms of public deliberation in which the powerless are empowered to speak and the powerful compelled to do so” (200). This instinct has been deeply coded into journalism’s DNA throughout its evolution, as has the notion of objectivity. Today’s journalism is the product of the struggle and paradoxical alliance of these two opposites; journalists tend to opt for objectivity and the shielding it provides.

James Carey (1992) defines news as a historic reality: “It is a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point of history—in this case by the middle class largely in the eighteenth century” (21). It is not static, as an invented cultural form; it is dynamic, it changes, and as it reflects a particular “hunger for experience . . . this hunger itself has a history grounded in the changing style and fortunes of the middle class” (Carey 1992, 21). Both news reading and writing change and evolve in accordance



with society, as they are “ritual acts and moreover dramatic actions” (Carey 1992, 18). As other commentators note, “Each time there is a period of significant social, economic and technological change, the way we get news goes through momentous transition” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 13).

As a result of this particular “hunger,” the first newspapers evolved out of coffeehouses, bars, courthouses, ports and trading centers in Europe—mainly England and the Netherlands—and America at the beginning of the 1600s (Stephens 1988, 77-165), when “enterprising printers began to collect the shipping news, gossip, and political arguments . . . and print it” (Kovach, Rosenstiel 2001, 22) And from the very beginning, some of these “print periodicals” saw their role as investigatory. As early as 1643, *The Parliament Scout* and *The Spie* in England were suggesting the “necessity of making an effort to search out and discover the news” (Sommerville 1996, 65). Investigative journalism is actually the root of any kind of journalism and has a rich historical tradition both in Britain and the United States. Furthermore, these early journalists were taking a stance in their reporting; in this sense the journalism they practiced was adversarial. And though this type of journalism waxed and waned throughout the years, it never disappeared in the history of the profession.

The first example of adversarial journalism in colonial newspapers in the United States can be traced to 1690 in Benjamin Harris’s *Publick Occurrences*. It

exposed allegedly ‘barbarous’ human rights abuses of French prisoners of war and a supposed sex scandal in which the king of France ‘used to lie with’ his ‘SonsWife.’ Four days later, British authorities shut down the newspaper; its first issue was also its last (Feldstein, 2006, 3).

According to Jeffrey A. Smith, distrust of state power was common for early American journalists, who believed that the press should serve as a check on this power; editors and writers began challenging religious and political power as early as the colonial era. Both the idea of a free press and the free press clause of the First Amendment evolved out of the insistence and experience of the press' role as a check on the use of power (Smith 1988, 162).

Advocacy, even partisan journalism “has defined some of the most memorable and important eras in U.S. history” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 115). Advocacy journalism was the defining characteristic of both the press in colonial America and the post-revolutionary “nation-building” press in American history. And the muckrakers definitely left their mark on the journalism of the twentieth century (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 115).

Although watchdog journalism is often hailed as a service that fulfills the public's need to know, it can also be construed merely as a way for the industry to “professionalize” itself. We can describe investigative journalism in general as “reporters themselves uncovering and documenting activities that have been previously unknown to the public” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, 116). This “journalism of outrage” can be characterized also as

a form of storytelling that probes the boundaries of America's civic conscience. . . . Investigative journalists are reformers not revolutionaries. They seek to improve the American system by pointing out its shortcomings rather than advocating its overthrow. By spotlighting specific abuses of particular policies or programs, the investigative reporter provides policy makers with the opportunity to take corrective actions without changing the distribution of power (Protess, et. al 1991, 5, 11).

While investigative journalism is generally viewed “as a way of waking citizens up to their political responsibilities,” Thomas C. Leonard points out the paradox related to the press’ watchdog role in the Progressive era—a decline in overall political participation in America “as this reporting gained strength” (1986, 184). Watchdog journalism has also become a “vital source of self-esteem and discipline in a profession that had neither an educational requirement nor a license by the state” (Leonard 1986, 222). In other words, this “anomalous” characteristic led the profession to justify itself in performing a watchdog role in the public’s name, “but in which the public plays no role, except as an audience. . .” (Carey 1997, 247). This “professional ideology of the press as a watchdog on government,” along with the idea of objectivity, plays an important role in the “professionalization process” of journalism (Allen 2005, 57, 65).

Generally, contemporary journalists tend to think that after reporting what needs to be reported, “If somebody wants to act . . . and do something about it, then that’s another phase of the process” (Ettema and Glasser 1998, 9). Where investigative journalism refuses to do more, it is the definitive starting point of advocacy—or adversarial—journalism. Advocacy, adversarial journalism pushes for a reaction; instead of waiting, it takes a stance and lobbies for change. In other words, advocacy journalism has “the ability to bring social problems to public attention as well as to push particular reforms higher on the policy agenda” (Ettema and Glasser 1998, 186). This was what muckrakers adopted in their journalism.

Advocacy reporting has deep roots in American journalism in particular. But the idea that the press should serve as an “unbiased recorder of fact” has similarly deep roots. Moreover, it has been described as the “chief occupational value of American

journalism” (Schudson 2001). As Ettema and Glasser point out, the penny press, as the beginning of modern journalism, also marks the beginning of “any account of the intimate relationship between adversarialism and detached observation” (1998, 65). The paradox between active adversarialism and objectivity lies in the “connection between moral custodianship and moral disengagement” (Ettema and Glasser 1998, 65). Can journalists find out what is wrong and what is worth publishing without making moral judgments?

### **Objectivity**

Objectivity in journalism, write Kovach and Rosenstiel, originally refers to “a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence” (2001, 72). Simply put, it is gathering and structuring “facts in a detached, unbiased, impersonal manner” (Tuchman 1972, 664). Three concepts are essential to understanding objectivity in journalism: “truthfulness,” which is reporting factually accurate information; “neutrality in the sense of fairness and balance,” which is presenting different views equally and seeking to be impartial and unbiased; and third, “neutrality in the sense of emotional detachment,” which is separating fact from comment (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 98). While the history of objectivity, according to Stephen Ward, begins with the precursors to newspapers like newsbooks and *corantos* (Ward 2004, 107), Michael Schudson argues that objectivity only really became important in the post-World War I era (Schudson 1978, 4).

Today it is fair to say that objectivity is at the heart of criticism directed at journalism. The profession is frequently criticized for failing to achieve objectivity, and at the same time the notion of objectivity is held to be illusionary or impossible. “In its

purest usage,” writes Jack Fuller, “the term suggested that journalism meant to be so utterly disinterested as to be transparent. The report was to be virtually the thing itself, unrefracted by the mind of the reporter. This of course, involved a hopelessly naïve notion from the beginning” (Fuller 1996, 14). Moreover, Gaye Tuchman has called journalists’ efforts to be objective a “strategic ritual” in which “the word ‘objectivity’ is being used defensively” (Tuchman 1972, 678). By “ritual” Tuchman means “a routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought,” and by “strategy” she refers to tactics used “offensively to anticipate attack or defensively to deflect critics” (Tuchman 1972, 661). According to Tuchman, the practice of newsgathering and reporting leaves no room for the notion of objectivity. By choosing whom to interview and which quotes to use, for example, journalists inevitably convey their opinions or perceptions on the story, Tuchman argues. Such “rituals” are strategically designed more to protect the journalist and the news organization against charges of bias; a journalist can “claim objectivity” by “presenting both sides of the story” or by using supporting evidence (Tuchman 1972, 665). Another process where Herbert J. Gans argues that journalists cannot claim objectivity is the news-judgment process. The process of deciding which events are newsworthy is not independent from the demands of the news production process, cultural bias or pre-existing expectations (Gans 2004, 146-158). At the same time, the search for reliable, accredited sources for the sake of objectivity resulted in relying heavily on official and government sources. Limiting journalism by relying on the views of elite sources and their perceptions of the situation is what Daniel C. Hallin studied in *The ‘Uncensored War:’ The Media and Vietnam*. Hallin contends that the general perception of the media’s opposition to the war

was a myth. Despite “the extraordinary freedom to report the war,” the media merely reflected the divisions among the elite sources; the extent of the media coverage was limited by the parameters of official discussion (Hallin 1989, 6-10). Moreover, Hallin found that journalists only felt the need to be objective when public opinion was divided on an issue. Analyzing the media’s coverage of the Vietnam War during its different stages, Hallin contends that if public opinion was for or against something, journalists no longer felt a need to be objective (Hallin 1989). He also highlighted how the elites used the media was considered and used as a “central” means to mobilize the public opinion (127).

This meant that governments had an incentive to offer the press access and give it adequate information and freedom to insure its credibility. . . . It also meant that censorship and other controls would be used to prevent damage to morale on the home front as well as to deny to the other side information about military operations and capabilities” (127).

The concept and the importance of objectivity differ from community to community, from time to time and place to place (Donsbach and Klett 1993). By the 1990s, critics and journalists were racing to pronounce the death of objectivity. Today, “almost nobody talks about objective reporting anymore” (Fuller 1996, 14). Meanwhile, the few who still talk about and defend the possibility of objectivity argue that new technologies have the potential to both achieve Jürgen Habermas’s active public sphere, which is centered on the rational and critical engagement with public affairs, and offer new possibilities to reclaim objectivity in journalism. Habermas explains that the eighteenth-century press “was for the first time established as a genuine critical organ of a public engaged in critical political debate” (1991, 60). According to Calcutt and Hammond, the capabilities of digital communication “can offer technical support for

reconfiguring relations between subjectivity and objectivity by the concept of news from everywhere” (2011, 144). They argue that new technologies have the potential to create a more active public sphere. Not the technology itself but the way journalists use it can help to accomplish the “collective process of creating objectivity” since “digital media technology allows more people to enter their vision of events into the pre-production phase of journalism” (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 145).

While new technologies have created more participatory media systems, it is also true that new media are under the occupation of commercial capitalism. Today the notion of objectivity still offers no more than the “basis of news as a commercial product” (Ettema and Glasser 1998, 201). For now, the participatory characteristic of the new media in Habermas’s theory of an active public sphere still remains an unfulfilled promise. Moreover, the idea of objectivity itself within watchdog journalism played a crucial role in the professionalization of journalism, a process that essentially removed journalists from the public sphere and resulted in viewing “the public as a body to be informed and managed rather than activated” (Allen 2005, 57, 65, 80).

### **Research questions, theoretical approach and methodology**

As a result of the “historically expanding arena of capitalist production,” once a “peripheral phenomena,” information-intensive activities today have become profoundly important for capitalist production and distribution (Schiller 2007). The accelerated commodification of information and the end of systems of self-employment in the organization of symbolic creativity mark the emergence of cultural industries (Schiller 2007, Bourdieu 1996, Williams 1966). In addition to their central role in today’s economy, cultural industries are “involved in the making and circulating of products that,

more than any other kind of industry, have an influence on our understanding and knowledge of the world” (Hesmondhalgh 2013). According to Williams (1981), culture is “the signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.” Williams’ definition invokes the two dimensions of intellectual analysis: the social and individual (or the production and text, or the textual and historical). It also summarizes the approach I take for the study of cultural industries: a critical political economy perspective that embraces the particular aspects of cultural studies. “Production is profoundly cultural and texts are determined by economic factors (among others)” (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 60). Culture is indeed ordinary and a product of everyday life, and at the same time, it is widely produced, distributed and consumed. Texts are different as produced and read, but the writers and readers are not equally the producers of texts. Power is both resource and a form of control, and it isn’t root only in individual subjectivities. “[People] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 2009). By studying the *Journal Sentinel*’s transition process, I aim to explore how historical transformations relate to the changes the newspaper went through—with their possible meanings for the future of the profession in mind.

This leads to a number of research questions that my research will attempt to answer. They are: Why did the *Journal Sentinel* decide to redefine itself as a watchdog-centric newspaper? How was the *Journal Sentinel*’s redefinition of its mission influenced by the emergence of new technologies and changing market conditions? How have these factors influenced the way that journalists define and justify the work they do? What



changes did this transition prompt within the newsroom and the journalists' perception of what news is? How has this process changed the perception of the role that journalism plays in the realization of democracy?

As power is “employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (Foucault 1980) and accessible through observational techniques (Donkor 2007), ethnographic methods can help us understand social and historical relationships while exploring what happens in cultural industry organizations. In order to explore the *Journal Sentinel*'s transformation process, throughout my master's study, I conducted 13 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with *Journal Sentinel* workers in 2013 and 2014, including advertising and marketing employees, and I also completed a semester-long ethnographic observation. I observed the paper's weekly watchdog unit meetings from the beginning of February to mid-May 2013 and joined watchdog reporter Meg Kissinger, a veteran journalist who covers Milwaukee's mental health system, while she did reporting for an award-winning series. On a few occasions, I was also able to join *Journal Sentinel* journalists for drinks and gatherings outside of the newsroom during and after my period of observation. Although the time I spent on this project was limited from a cultural anthropology viewpoint, I was still able to collect valuable data as journalists love to talk about themselves and their jobs. *Journal Sentinel* journalists were no exception; they were open to the idea of me attending meetings and observing the reporting process. I chose in-depth interviews and participant observation as my methods not only because those methods are more suitable to understanding work lives (Rubin and Rubin 2005), but also because those methods allow for capturing and exploring complex questions without reducing the processes to statistics that risk losing much of the richness of

everyday life (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Moreover, qualitative, in-depth interviews can help the researcher “understand experiences and reconstruct events” in which he or she did not participate; the researcher can “delve into important personal issues” and can examine different sides and accounts of an issue (Rubin and Rubin 2005). I recorded and transcribed all of my interviews. The length of my interviews varied from 40 minutes to two and a half hours. I conducted follow-up interviews when I felt they were needed.

According to Sally Falk Moore (1987), in order to put the everyday “sameness” into a historical context, it is important for the field worker to have a “processual perspective,” treating the “day-to-day stuff” as “the product of effort.” As she quotes Sherry Ortner, the goal is understanding history as something that people make within the confines of the system, not something that happens to them (Ortner 1984, 159). Throughout my fieldwork, I tried to observe, read and analyze the everyday interactions and the practices as “struggles to construct orders and actions that undo them,” while keeping in mind the power relations of the “local moment” (Moore 1987, 735).

And finally, I have a personal interest in the conditions and problems of Western journalism as a former journalist at an English-language newspaper in Istanbul, Turkey. Before coming to Milwaukee, I was the editor for international news and diplomacy at an English-language newspaper in Turkey, *Hurriyet Daily News*. My job involved editing stories and deciding which stories should go on the page and how they should be displayed; in addition, I wrote analyses of the day’s top news. The Turkish media landscape reflects many of the issues I grapple with in this thesis: the concentration of media ownership, the rise of professionalization, the placement of profit advertising

above all standards, and legislation that favors large, multi-national companies (Coskuntuncel 2013).

### **The research setting**

During the meetings I was simply listening, taking notes and observing, but I was able to participate and on a few occasions even help Kissinger with her reporting. On one occasion, I tried to participate in a project's meeting as the project team grappled with which photo to use as the main visual; they simply ignored me. With the exception of Kissinger's reporting sites and the friendly gatherings, my main observation site was the *Journal Sentinel* newsroom in the Journal Communications building in downtown Milwaukee. The *Journal Sentinel* newsroom in the Journal Communications complex consists of two buildings. Before the merger of the *Journal* and the *Sentinel* in 1995, the two buildings housed the two newspapers, but today only one building is in service. The newsroom is on the fourth floor. The web section is located in a spot that staffers call the "hub," which overlooks the newsroom. On one side are six big TV screens mounted on the ceiling, and on the other side are the managers' offices. At one end of the hub is a mini TV studio, with a raised platform with a chair and a professional video camera. The newsroom has an open-office concept in which the sections are created only by desk clusters, not by cubicles. But managers and some editors still have separate offices with large glass windows. The meeting room, where all the watchdog meetings are held, is on the same floor as the main newsroom and is not far from the hub. On the fourth floor, the elevators open to the middle of a long corridor. The main newsroom is a few steps away, right across from the elevators. Following the corridor either to the left or right are

several meeting rooms, an office and bathrooms. The watchdog meeting room is at the right end of the corridor.

## Chapter III

### The Birth of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and its Watchdog Team

After surviving a wave of acquisitions in the 1980s driven by big chains in the newspaper industry, Milwaukee's 158-year-old morning *Milwaukee Sentinel* and its afternoon sister, *Milwaukee Journal*, became a single paper on April 2, 1995, in an effort to curb the effects of dwindling circulations and high newsprint costs. As early as 1992, the trade publication *Editor & Publisher* described the "tough economic times" facing newspapers (Kerwin 1992) in terms of advertising revenues. It reported that newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and both the Milwaukee newspapers, the *Journal* and the *Sentinel*, were adopting new strategies like designating an ombudsman and creating hot-lines to satisfy advertisers' needs. In August 1994, in response to new technologies, the *Journal* and the *Sentinel* partnered with Prodigy Services Co. to create a local online service, covering Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. James Currow, then-president of Journal/Sentinel Inc., announced the decision by stating:

We intend to offer far more than an electronic newspaper. Our service will include deep databases, information on local communities, entertainment and education features, local bulletin boards, a dialogue with our editors and much more (*Editor & Publisher* 1994, 29).

Innovation and the adoption of new and superior technologies can be a source of excess profits for capitalists, at least for a while (Harvey 2003). Moreover, according to Williams (2003), the priorities of the "real decision-making groups" are the determining factor in the development of a new technology in response to a social need. The process of the development of digital technologies and their hegemony in economic and social

life were no different. The development of the internet and the greater telecommunication systems were subjected to neoliberal and market-driven policies. Governments and organizations like the World Trade Organization ensured that regulations and policies favored corporate interests, while corporations realized and bankrolled the new systems' possibilities to move their production to cheaper labor markets and develop worldwide consumer markets (Schiller 2007). The control over technology is vital in the capitalist mode of production, especially in monopolistic and oligopolistic markets. According to David Harvey (2003), one way to accomplish this control is adopting a technology that requires massive amounts of capital so potential competitors are discouraged from entering the field. What happened on a global scale is also what happened in Milwaukee's media market. The *Journal Sentinel* was quick to adopt digital technologies. The newspaper had a web presence in the early days of the internet, digitalized its news production, delivery and advertising services, moved its customer services overseas, invested in expensive data technologies for data-intensive investigative reporting, and is continuing to adopt new technologies. In addition to staying up to date with technology, the paper tried to regain its professional jurisdiction by rebranding itself as a watchdog-centric journal. At the same time, the company was able to lower labor costs and tighten its control over the newsroom. Nevertheless, the *Journal Sentinel* was struggling to "monetize" its internet operations during the 1990s, like many other companies in the industry. In 1993 newspaper companies were already discussing the question of making money via online advertising in the United States (Turow 2011). A 1996 article in *Editor & Publisher* (Fitzgerald 1996b) heralded that "virtual advertising is for real":

Although cyberspace was virtually commercial-free just 2 years ago, companies are discovering the value of advertising on the Web, and Net culture now accepts

that users should pay for useful information. In 1995, some 270 companies spent \$12.4 million advertising on the Internet. Ad revenue could grow in a range of \$20 million to \$37 million. The key to success is to cultivate multiple revenue streams such as Internet access fees, classified ads, subscriptions for newspaper content and premium charges for archive searches (Fitzgerald 1996b, 30).

While reporting on how reporters and editors were starting to “prowl cyberspace daily,” the same article also mentions the *Journal Sentinel*'s use of new online and software technologies: “[T]he *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* has added a virtual reality movie to its Packer Plus online that puts users inside an away football game at San Francisco's 3Com Park.” The company used “Apple’s Quick Time VR,” which was “on loan from Marquette University for the project,” to create a “navigable movie,” by taking a series of overlapping photos and combining them (Fitzgerald 1996, 30).

Although it was the beginning of a series of transformations for the newborn *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 1995 was also a year of tremendous change for the entire newspaper industry via a series of newspaper closings, acquisitions and mergers. Daily newspaper transactions in 1995 reached a record high in the United States with 88 titles changing hands, the most active year since 1986 when 87 properties were bought and sold, also raising concerns about monopolization (Case 1996b, 18). In the years following the merger, *Journal Sentinel* employees would face another round of transformation—with more buyouts and layoffs—and today an upcoming merger. In 2014, the *Journal Sentinel*'s parent company, Journal Communications, and Cincinnati-based E.W. Scripps announced a deal that joins the *Journal Sentinel* and other Scripps newspapers into a new company called Journal Media Group. Scripps would hold the majority stocks of the new company, while Journal Communication’s broadcast properties would be owned by Scripps. The deal was expected to be finalized in 2015 (Kirchen 2014).

Until the 1995 merger, the employee-owned *Journal* and *Sentinel* were viewed as places that offered lifetime jobs in an industry where many journalists often switch papers. As one reporter noted, “Rarely anyone was fired” (Shepard 1996, 28). In addition to Milwaukee’s strong community culture, the unique ownership organization of Journal Communications Inc., which owned both the *Sentinel* and *Journal*, was also an important factor in journalists’ decision to stay. At the time (and until recently) “the company was 90% owned by employees through a stock trust and 10% by descendants of Harry J. Grant, who was chairman when he created an employee ownership plan in 1937” (*Editor & Publisher* 1996, 15). This employee-owned, but not employee-run, structure made many employees wealthy before the merger of the two papers. “Stock was held by employees and must be sold back to the company when an employee leaves,” and throughout the years, stock values remained relatively high and stable (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). One newspaper analyst reported, “The cash employees have given to the company to acquire interests in the employee trust has been an important source of working capital,” (Morton 2003) and some long-time workers who throughout their career invested in the stock plan left the paper with huge retirement packages until the company decided to go public in 2003 and the stocks crashed. Meg Kissinger, a general assignment reporter at the time, emphasized the veteran newsroom in an interview: “With my 12 years, I was the baby there” (Shepard 1996, 28). According to Tom Silverstein, current president of the Milwaukee Newspaper Guild, employees saw the Milwaukee newsroom as a place where they could spend the rest of their career—until the merger. Before the merger of the two papers, the company hired editors to lead the buyouts and layoffs. Then it was “a chaotic mess,” Silverstein said during our interview.



[T]hey were just hit men. They came in, and you know they were professionals in cutting costs and people, and they just slashed, you know, just laid off people with no compunction about it at all. And so that left a lot of bad feelings. That's when people started to feel like, oh, OK, this isn't the secure place I thought it was where I can spend the rest of a career. When I started, it was a place where you'd say, if I land here and, I'm good, I'll retire in Milwaukee. It was a great place . . . to raise a family (Silverstein, April 24, 2014).

The announcement of the merger immediately created shockwaves in the city and among the newspapers' longtime employees. The merger of the two newsrooms also meant the departure of hundreds of employees. The infuriated Newspaper Guild condemned the merger, along with eight other unions, as a "not well thought out" decision that was made "without any involvement by the employee owners of this newspaper and any input from the community itself" (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). "Employee ownership is a sham," Guild local President Jack Norman scolded (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). According to Kissinger, "it was like a shotgun wedding" (Kissinger, March 25, 2013). The transition was quick and dramatic; in less than three months before the new paper's first issue, the editorial board, management structure, beats, design, computer system and even the carriers went through a string of changes (Shepard 1996, 28). During the merger period, 248 full-time employees left the papers and about 100 newsroom jobs were cut (Shepard 1996, 28; Fitzgerald 1995, 12).

According to management, the merger was the best way to cope with dwindling circulations, which hindered raising advertising rates, and high newsprint costs. To editors, it was a necessity and was inevitable given the situation in newspaper industry. "We knew it would be difficult to generate enough revenue to offset the costs we faced," Currow said in an interview (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). According to *Milwaukee Journal* Editor and Vice President Mary Jo Meisner, "The newsprint factor was like a final blow"

(Fitzgerald 1995, 12). “The papers were looking at an additional \$9 million just for newsprint” in 1995 (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). Complaining about dividing resources, editors and management heralded “more crime coverage, more neighborhood coverage and more sports coverage,” and predicted a circulation of well over 300,000 for the remaining newspaper (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). Before the merger, the *Journal*’s circulation was 214,753 and the *Sentinel* was selling 175,330 (Fitzgerald 1995, 12). The new *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* debuted at 328,000, but three months after the merger, dropping circulation numbers proved that the predictions were overly optimistic, leading Currow to resign. A year after the merger, circulation had dropped to 281,669 (Shepard 1996, 30).

Only months after the merger, while the newspaper was still feeling the pain of the transition, an anonymous newspaper company using a broker offered to buy the newspaper for \$1 billion and continued its efforts for more than a year in an attempt to get Journal Communications executives to the table (Case 1996, 11). This was the second bid that was rejected by Journal Communications in a decade. In 1986 the company rejected a \$600 million offer by the *Boston Globe*, which itself several years later was acquired by The New York Times Co. To fend off the relentless push to sell the paper, in 1996 Journal Communications announced that it would gradually increase the value of its stocks over five years (Sacharow 1996, 28). “The founders of the employee-ownership program in 1937 made clear their intention that the newspaper was to remain independent and employee-owned forever,” said Robert A. Kahlor, Journal Communications chairman and CEO, in an interview in 1996. Although the merger and the \$1 billion bid were the subjects of articles and analyses about the monopolization trend in the American newspaper industry (Case 1996b, 18; Fitzgerald 1996, 9), Journal Communications, along

with the *Journal Sentinel*, owns television and radio stations and other media properties. The company itself indeed can be the subject of media monopolization concerns in the city of Milwaukee.

As Milwaukee became a one-newspaper town in 1995, the newspaper industry witnessed a record-high number of transitions. Billions of dollars and a number of newspapers changed hands in 1995, including Walt Disney Co.'s \$19 billion merger with Capital Cities/ABC Inc. that involved eight dailies and several dozen weeklies, and Gannett's acquisition of Multimedia Inc. for \$1.7 billion that added 60 daily and weekly newspapers plus five television stations to its chain (Fitzgerald 1996, 9; Case 1996b, 18). Mergers were on the rise, too, with not only Milwaukee but also cities like Lincoln, Providence, Indianapolis and Phoenix joining the ranks of one-paper cities (Case 1996b; Fitzgerald 1996). Meanwhile, "the only paper launched during the year, the bilingual edition of the *New York Daily News*, *El Daily News* died before its six-month birthday" (Fitzgerald 1996, 9). All of these buyouts, closings and mergers killed hundreds of jobs and led to never-ending cuts that caused protests and strikes (Fitzgerald 1996, 9; Case 1996, 18). Nevertheless, according to both Tom Moeschberger, current executive representative of major accounts, and Mark Misurelli, major accounts manager and the manager of sales executives, if the *Journal Sentinel* is still in business and making profits it is because of its monopolistic position in the local market. One of the lines that the advertising and Journal Communications executives love to tout is that the *Journal Sentinel* has one of the highest Sunday penetration rates in the country; according to the most recent data, the newspaper's overall penetration hovers around 59 percent (The Pew Research 2013). That means that 59 percent of people in the *Journal Sentinel*'s coverage

area read the paper in some form. The paper's penetration rate was historically always high, and although it is beyond the scope of this research, the high penetration rates, the community's appreciation to their daily newspaper and their sense of obligation to buy it might be linked with the city's social fabric which still bears the stamp of its working-class history and value system. Furthermore, perhaps one of the reasons the paper has been able to maintain its high penetration rate is that its watchdog journalism is unmatched in the region. Both Misurelli and Moeschberger, during our interview, emphasized their ability to sell the entire Milwaukee market as one of the key components of the advertising department's selling strategies. "It's our biggest strength. We rank number one in the country in terms of market leadership," said Misurelli. "Still no one can reach as many households in Milwaukee as we do (Misurelli, Dec. 15, 2013)"

On April 2, 1995, the first day that the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* hit newsstands, the newspaper's editorial was titled, "Where we stand at the *Journal Sentinel*: Our voice will be independent; our bottom-line will be welfare of community, state." The editorial quoted the tenets that were expressed in the first issue of the *Sentinel* in 1837 and the late Harvey W. Schwandner, who held high-level editing positions with both the *Journal* and the *Sentinel*, on the responsibilities of a daily newspaper. The editorial emphasized the importance of being an independent paper and set the goal of working "zealously for the welfare of its readers and people" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 1995, 14). Going a step beyond the statements made before the merger about how the new publication would be able to report more crimes and sports news, the editorial also stated, "Reporting the news is not enough" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 1995, 14). This would resonate years later, when the paper went through yet another

transformation to become an investigative journal. In 2009, three years after the creation of a watchdog team, *Journal Sentinel* Managing Editor George Stanley wrote that the paper's mission was "to let people know what their public officials and local institutions were up to—to hold them accountable" (Stanley 2009). The article was published shortly after, as Stanley put it, the paper said "goodbye to dozens of hard-working" journalists in another round of economic-based buyouts and layoffs. "A hurricane of change," wrote Stanley, "has battered the newspaper industry as recession whirls across advancing waves of communications technologies." The *Journal Sentinel* was trying to hold onto its watchdog role amid "a hurricane of change" (Stanley 2009).

The 1995 merger was only the beginning of a series of transformations—with more buyouts and layoffs—for the newborn *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. In 2006, the paper decided to transition into a watchdog-centric journal. With the rise of the internet, social media and smartphones, breaking news was no longer part of newspapers' monopoly. And with people already paying their internet and cellular data bills, news came with no extra cost. "From the business perspective, survival depends on giving people something that they can't get anywhere else," said Stanley (Stanley, April 12, 2013). According to *Journal Sentinel* workers, the watchdog journalism at the *Journal Sentinel* has a few distinct characteristics when compared to watchdog reporting by other investigative outlets: It is centered on data-driven, investigative series that are locally focused and written by elite, dogged reporters. The *Journal Sentinel*'s watchdog series also typically feature a clearly identifiable antagonist that creates the opportunity for the newspaper to propose a solution to a problem; this is how the newspaper brands itself as an outlet that provides a public service. Stanley believes that every newspaper regardless

of its size should follow this path. “Watchdog is essential for journalism,” he said and added that despite having a newsroom “triple” the size of today’s newsroom during the 1990s, he believes that today, the newspaper is doing “better, more quality journalism with a smaller newsroom” (Stanley, April 12, 2013). During the transition process, the paper went through rounds of economic-based buyouts and layoffs; all new hires since then were targeted to strengthening the paper’s watchdog role and its online presence. While most newspapers invested more in breaking news, which they saw as an opportunity to lower costs through new digital technologies, the *Journal Sentinel* decided to adopt a strategy that was more expensive in terms of technology, expertise and time. The *Journal Sentinel* wanted to brand itself as the place that people can find “information they can’t get anywhere else,” said Greg Borowski, the current editor of the watchdog unit (Borowski, April 12, 2013).

For more than a century, investigative journalism in its traditional form has been touted by news organizations as the way the press serves the public with a check on the government and its institutions. But these same news outlets often stop short of playing the role of the advocate for the public. Fearing the risk of overstepping the fine line between passively but effectively serving as the public’s moral compass and advocating for a cause, the press in general has tended to report a problem then wait for the public to respond. A step beyond that line is usually considered advocacy journalism or adversarial reporting. In the past five years, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* has won three Pulitzer Prizes, all for in-depth reporting; two were for cases that uncovered improper use of public funds. With these series, the *Journal Sentinel* openly took a stance on issues they reported and pushed for change. During my interviews, the *Journal Sentinel* employees I

spoke with were enthusiastic about the prizes the newspaper has won and the impact the series have had, especially in the local community. Both Moeschberger and Misurelli confirmed that the prizes the paper has won and the impacts they have made are “so big” for their advertising strategies while reaching out to local businesses (Moeschberger, Dec. 5, 2013; Misurelli, Dec. 15, 2013). Although they said they use the newspaper’s watchdog characteristic as a selling point, further in our conversation it appeared that they have a vague understanding of the paper’s watchdog reporting. For example, they tend to see even stories about the Green Bay Packers as local, investigative stories.

Despite surviving the waves of mergers and acquisitions in 1908s and 1990s, on July 30, 2014, the Journal Communications Inc. and E.W. Scripps Co. announced an agreement to “merge their broadcast operations while spinning off their newspapers into a separate company” (Glauber 2014). With the deal, Scripps will own the Journal Communications’ 34 radio stations, and the company will emerge from the deal “as the nation’s fifth-largest independent TV group... When completed, Scripps shareholders will own 69% of the broadcasting company and 59% of Journal Media Group,” a new company that will consist of the *Journal Sentinel* and Scripps’ newspapers (Glauber 2014). Timothy E. Stautberg, who oversees Scripps’ newspapers, would under the deal become the CEO of the newly formed Journal Media Group, and the companies are expecting to close the deal in 2015. “I look forward to what we can build, leveraging the strengths of what we have today,” Stautberg commented (Glauber 2014) after the agreement was announced, which was followed by a round of buyouts and layoffs.

Thirteen newswriters took the buyout and four were laid off by the company—the worst round of cuts since 2009<sup>3</sup>.

The buyouts and layoffs in 2014 came amid new contract negotiations between the Milwaukee Newspaper Guild and Journal Communications. After the announcement, Silverstein and the guild members were trying to decide on a tactic to protest the buyouts and layoffs. The merger also came shortly after the paper showed some progress in readership numbers and advertising revenue. According to 2012 report by the *Business Journal*, despite declining circulation numbers, a jump in the *Journal Sentinel*'s digital readership “delivered an overall increase” in readership from the previous year (Kirchen 2012a). According to the report, the Sunday edition, which attracts most advertising and readership, dropped from an average of 311,765 readers in 2011 to 286,071 readers in 2012. “Digital-edition readership on Sundays, on the other hand, climbed to 41,647 as of Sept. 30 from 10,181 a year ago” (Kirchen 2012a). Other numbers related to the paper's digital readership—like the paper's iPad app—from 2012 also show successes in adopting digital technologies (Kirchen 2012b).

### **Establishing the watchdog team**

Both reporters and editors interviewed for this study defend the decision to become a more watchdog-centric journal by saying that with the expertise and resources they have, they can and should give readers and the community something that they

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<sup>3</sup> In 2009 the guild accepted a pay cut; the company threatened to lay off members of the bargaining unit if they didn't. As a steward in the union at the time, Silverstein described 2009 as a “horrible year”: “[I]t was sneaky. So they came to us and said if you don't take a 6.6 percent pay cut, we're going to have to lay off tons of people. So people got scared, and some of us who have been around said, hey, they're going to lay us off anyways if you take the pay cut, don't take the pay cut. It's forever. You're not going to get it back... People's jobs were on the line, and they were scared, and nobody knew what was going to happen. So the guild agreed to take the pay cut, and as part of that agreement the company agreed that for at least the next two months it would not lay anybody off. And then the day after that two months came, they laid off half of the newsroom [between 2009 and 2013]” (Silverstein, April 24, 2014).



cannot get anywhere else. According to the reporters and editors I interviewed, readers can get daily news from any news outlet or any “social media” platform, but not the investigative, in-depth stories related to the city and the state. Since the creation of the watchdog team, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* has won many journalism, including multiple Pulitzer Prizes, most of them for investigative reporting. The newspaper has run several investigative series that utilized a tool many news outlets in the past have avoided: adversarial tradition in journalism—also known as watchdog or muckraking reporting. The main distinction here is between detached observation and actively pushing for change. Recognizing the enduring importance of objectivity in their reporting, most of the Journal Sentinel reporters embraced the press’ role as agent for change while holding the powerful accountable in the name of the powerless. Within this categorization, journalists defined their type of journalism as sometimes adversarial, sometimes advocacy, watchdog, public reporting and mostly a type combination of these journalisms. In 2010, a *Journal Sentinel* reporter won the Pulitzer for local reporting for her “Cashing in on Kids” investigation into fraud in the state’s child-care subsidy program. In 2008, another reporter won in the same category for his investigation into Milwaukee County’s pension payouts. As a result of these projects, the *Journal Sentinel*’s reputation was strengthened as a hub for investigative reporting. The paper’s recent investigative reports from the recent years include “Imminent Danger,” a look at how the country’s mental health laws often allow dangerous people to walk the streets; “Empty Cradles,” a year-long look at the reasons underlying Milwaukee’s troubling infant mortality rate; “Both Sides of the Law,” an investigation into how many active-duty Milwaukee police officers had violated the law; “Chemical Fallout,” a series on the ill

health effects caused by exposure to dangerous chemicals found in homes and food containers; “Deaths in Detention,” a series on deaths in custody, which among others investigated the death of Derek Williams and prompted new department rules; “Chronic Crisis,” another award-winning series that allowed me the opportunity to study in more depth during my ethnographic observation. The series examined Milwaukee County’s “troubling” mental health system, which prompted a package of bills and actions by the state in efforts to reform the system. *Journal Sentinel* reporters place impact and change their reporting prompts above other criteria like awards or clicks when they talk about the success of their stories. Moreover, they try to provide tools to readers in order to create public pressure on certain issues they report on and push for change. In “Imminent Danger,” for example, the reporter provided both local and national examples of a broken mental health system that overlooked cases like Richard Wilson, who killed his grandfather with an ax on Mother’s Day in 2011. To gain public input and effect change, the newspaper held a panel discussion at Marquette Law School about the changes that should be implemented. In “Empty Cradles,” the newspaper provided resources for new young parents to read to avoid unsafe co-sleeping and other factors that often result in infant death. As a result of the newspaper’s focus on infant mortality, the United Way campaigned and raised millions of dollars that was earmarked to provide yet more resources for young parents. In “Both Sides of the Law,” the newspaper offered readers a database detailing how and when police officers violated the law and how the system failed to discipline them. In “Chronic Crises,” the paper proposed concrete legal, political and practical solutions in order to reform the system. In similar series, the paper published contact information of representatives and officials, sometimes with guides, for

readers to get in touch with them in order to create public pressure. Most of the series also provided examples of different legal and political practices that are proved to be working in different cities, states and sometimes even countries as possible solutions for different areas from mental health to law enforcement.

Stories like these call attention “to the breakdown of social systems and disorder within public institutions that cause injury and injustice; in turn, their stories implicitly demand the response of public officials—and the public itself—to that breakdown and disorder,” which is what Ettema and Glasser call the main elements of investigative journalism (1998, 3). The *Journal Sentinel* not only provides the reporting groundwork for this kind of journalism, but it also publishes follow-up impact stories that show it is pushing and looking for action from authorities and sometimes directly telling readers what they should do in order to reduce the “disorder” it points out.

## Chapter IV

### Organizational Change and Managing a Divided Newsroom

The watchdog team was created in 2006 when the paper brought in an investigative editor from California's *Orange County Register*, Mark Katches, to lead the transitioning of the paper to a watchdog-centric journal. According to Stanley, they wanted to do more computerized, data-based investigative reporting, but initially he and Editor-in-Chief Marty Kaiser had many discussions about whether to create a separate watchdog team.

We resisted the idea because we believed that if we separate specific reporters from their daily reporting beats, they would lose their value. If reporters were pulled off the street, from their everyday relationships with their sources, their tips and sources would dry up, they wouldn't know the members, heads of departments, institutions anymore, and their productivity would decline. So we didn't really want a separate team. Then, as we continued to discuss the matter, we agreed to create a separate team but keep the watchdog reporters' beats at the same time (Stanley, April 12, 2013).

The strategy of keeping watchdog reporters' beats seemed to be working during the time that I observed Kissinger's reporting process. We attended the public hearing of a John Doe investigation into the death of a Milwaukee County mental health patient, Brandon Johnson, for a series on Milwaukee's mental health system. Kissinger appeared to not only know the mental health advocates and other journalists following the hearing but also the assistant district attorney, the representative of the Johnson family and the judge. After talking with the assistant district attorney and the family members, the Johnson family's representative approached Kissinger to inform her that he would be allowed to submit his questions to the assistant district attorney. "Good," Kissinger responded.

According to Kissinger, since the transition in 2006, “everything has changed” (Kissinger, March 25, 2013). The newspaper not only changed its reporting style and process but also changed organizationally. When the watchdog team was created, managers interviewed reporters to decide who would be in the unit. Stanley said that although he and Kaiser had some ideas before the interviews about who should be on the team, they discovered that some of their initial choices were not suitable for the job, others showed a “natural ability” to be a watchdog reporter, and some didn’t even want to be on the team (Stanley, April 12, 2013). Stanley gave Raquel Rutledge, a watchdog team member, and her reporting as an example of those who have “a natural ability.” Rutledge is by her choice a part-time employee so that she could spend more time as a mother in the community. Stanley explained that Rutledge once got a tip while she was waiting in line at a market when she eavesdropped on a conversation about a common, costly car carburetor problem. Then she tried to find out:

Then she delved deeper and found out that specifically Honda cars and another car brand that I can’t remember now have relatively smaller fuel injector holes. She went to mechanics and found out that a lot of them were exaggerating the prices, for example, by trying to convince the customers to change their whole carburetor instead of an easy, cheap cleanup of the injector hole. Then she also found out that most of the cars were either from the same part of the city or driving through that area in a daily basis. In the end, she found out that the whole problem was caused by dirty fuel that was sold against regulations by a particular Cisco gas station in that area. It appeared that the owner wasn’t using detergent, which was in violation of both Cisco and the city. (Stanley, April 12, 2013).

Nevertheless, according to Stanley, after the interviews, some reporters were upset that they were not chosen to be in the watchdog unit, which created tensions in the newsroom. “In the end, mostly big projects win awards. Some thought, ‘How come I can’t get the chance to work on projects?’” Stanley said. The solution was to give any

reporter with a story idea the chance to work on and finish a long-term investigative story regardless of whether they are on the watchdog team. According to Stanley, it took a long time for managers to “convince” reporters that this system would work; management, he said, “had to prove it with action” and show that they would provide reporters with the time and resources from the watchdog team to pursue an investigative story.

Watchdog reporters have the luxury of spending much more time, usually months, on their reports, which often win awards and subsequently put the reporters in the spotlight. Beat reporters, on the other hand, have to produce at least one story, most of the times multiple stories, in a day. There are examples of reporters who are not on the watchdog team who were given a chance to produce investigative series and who won prestigious awards—examples that Stanley cites as proof that it is an integrated process. But both watchdog and beat reporters admit that there are still tensions in the newsroom because of the dichotomy in the reporting operations. First of all, while some beat reporters have had the chance to work on long-term, investigative projects, watchdog reporters for the most part are not filing daily beat reports. Editors then have to cover a beat reporter’s daily work when he or she works on a watchdog project with another beat reporter. Second, there isn’t enough staff to cover the absence of a beat reporter on a daily basis; it is nearly impossible for beat reporters to allocate enough time to investigate long-term stories or to think about in-depth story ideas amid their daily deadline rush without someone covering their beat. Moreover, they do not attend watchdog meetings, where most of the brainstorming for in-depth reporting ideas takes place. Finally, beat reporters do not have the expertise, experience or training to conduct computerized, data-driven journalism.

Erin Richards, a daily metro reporter covering the education beat, acknowledges that it is “a divided newsroom” between those “who have the ability to work on the projects and drive the readership in the Sunday paper” and beat reporters, who have to meet daily deadlines.

At the time it did seem like that was going to be a team that would be a bit of a rotating team. For example, you’d be on the team while you’re working on a project, and you’d go back to some of the daily beat reporting when you weren’t on the, you know, when your project is finished. In reality that’s not really how it’s worked. You’ve had people who were already doing mostly special projects beyond that team and continued to do the special projects where the rest of the newsroom that was doing the beat reporting, continued to do most of the beat reporting (Richards, April 18, 2013).

Richards joined the newspaper in 2007 after doing an internship at the *Journal Sentinel* in 2006, when the transition period was in its early days. She said she “would have been gunning for a chance to be interviewed to be part of the [watchdog] team” if she were “five years into her career at that point.” She added: “There’s been a talk since then about trying to get on a better rotating schedule with that whole thing, but that it hasn’t really happened yet.” When I asked her whether she had a chance to work on a long-term project, Richards said she has “never been explicitly denied” work on an in-depth project but added, “It’s just that it dies a natural death because there are so many other things that need to be covered and without the time to only focus on the investigative piece you end up trying to continue to satisfy your editor, who needs daily and weekend stories.” She explained how she worked on a couple of explanatory projects on her own and how it was difficult to allocate the time and resources to be able to execute a deeper investigative story.

It wasn’t as much of a deep-dive [as] on the investigative team. So I have had a chance to do those, but my opportunities have been limited a bit because I’m not

on the I-team [investigative team], and I'm the only one person covering this beat. So all the daily reporting comes to me and there's only so much you can do in an eight- or nine-hour workday (Richards, April 18, 2013).

According to Silverstein, the separate watchdog unit has created a dichotomy in the newsroom, where the "elite staff gets the freedom to work at its own pace, [on] award-winning projects" and the rest who have to fill the paper everyday. He called those workers the "grinders."

I'm in that grinder group. When they need something for the paper, they call me, and say, we're short on stuff. So I sympathize with that group more than I do the others, just from a personal standpoint but as union president, I don't want that to divide us. That's a big concern of mine, you know. We can't let that — it's natural for that side that doesn't win all the awards to bitch about all the work it has. It's not the Pulitzer Prize-winning people's fault that the system is set up this way, you know. We didn't set that system (Silverstein, April 24, 2014).

As Richards says, being on the watchdog team comes with obvious advantages. All of the brainstorming for investigative story ideas, extensive help on collecting and analyzing data sets, and time and resources that are needed for a watchdog project are all routinely provided to the watchdog team. As a result, watchdog reporters are able to produce award-winning stories and attract more attention not only among readers but also institutions that are willing to create partnerships and channel funds. The watchdog team is composed of six investigative reporters with different reporting beats, one data specialist, three PolitiFact reporters, one assistant editor, one columnist and an editor that oversees the team. One multimedia producer and one programmer also work closely with and mainly for the team. Stanley, the managing editor, also closely monitors and oversees the watchdog operation. During the production process, the photographers, videographers, print designers and web producers assigned to the project also join the



team. Three other reporters that mainly write explanatory stories also work closely with the team. The watchdog unit meets once a week for specific, ongoing projects and once a month for general issues like ways to improve search optimization, data visualization or data collection.

During the monthly meetings, the group also talks about potential story ideas; it can be from a tip, a news story or other investigative projects that were done by other news outlets in the country. For example, on March 7, 2013, during one of the monthly meetings, Greg Borowski, the projects editor, brought up a conversation that he and Stanley had had before the meeting about the rise of drug abuse and heroin-related cases in the state. Stanley then said that based on what he “heard and read recently,” heroin and opium-based drug use among young people in Wisconsin was on the rise. “Apparently it is cheap and easy to get,” he said. He gave examples of recent cases that ended with deaths. Others also gave examples. Stanley said he didn’t do much research on the issue but said there could be interesting links with opium from Afghanistan, which is the “primary revenue for the Taliban.” They need to research it, he said, but if they can find a trend or a link, then “that means while these kids are killing themselves, they are also funding the Taliban, which the U.S. is at war against,” he said. One of the reporters said these heroin cases were not actually a recent thing: “It’s been like that for years.” Kevin Crowe, the newly hired data specialist, said he knew of a database that they could check for recent years. Although they said it is hard to get data on county-by-county level, they agreed to try to find that data for heroin and opium-based drug abuse cases. After searching a few counties, they said, they would be able to see what’s going on and would have a better idea.

The group also examines other newspapers' watchdog series. During a monthly meeting on April 11, two reporters presented two investigative projects. The first was about the bad conditions and lack of governance in religious children's homes in Tampa Bay. Ellen Gabler, another newly hired data reporter and assistant editor of the watchdog unit, presented the series. She said that she really liked the writing, and she read the lead of the first part of the series. She also said that they did a good job presenting their findings and loopholes in the regulations without boring the reader. Stanley commented that although this story—religious home abuses in the Tampa Bay area—was done before, the paper didn't ignore the latest incidents in some of these homes and went on to further investigate the incidents. Stanley also asked about the situation and regulations of similar religious homes in Milwaukee. The data reporters said they would look into the topic. Borowski asked about the web presentation. The reporter said she also liked that the page was not full of every data tidbit they had. "They presented only the essential, important data," she said. Stanley talked about one of his recent experiences when he was a judge for a journalism award and about how he and the other judges eliminated a story because it exaggerated the data presentation. Then he asked the reporter whether she felt as if, "Oh, I wish they'd did this and that, too?" while she read the story. She said no.

James Nelson, a PolitiFact reporter, then presented another investigative story, this time by a McClatchy newspaper in South Carolina about hospitals and hospital bills in the area. He said, "It was well done, but they didn't go and find a bad guy." The *Journal Sentinel* watchdog team loves to find bad guys in a story; it is one of the primary indicators of whether they will delve deeper into a project or story idea. Nelson said the series was a kind of encyclopedia of area hospitals that contained everything from CEOs'

paychecks to patient bills. According to Nelson, the newspaper did a good job looking into nonprofit hospitals and how they actually operate like for-profit ones by breaking down and comparing patient bills. He said he also liked the interactive map that they used. He also mentioned that one of the publishers was on the board of a big hospital that the paper investigated and that it became “an issue over there.” He said that because it was a joint project, they were able to assign four reporters, four editors, two graphic designers, four online producers and 11 photographers. We all expressed our astonishment, and most of the reporters in the room joked about the lack of staff at the *Journal Sentinel*. Stanley said he had read the story, too, and “besides the comprehensiveness of the report,” he said they did a good job examining nonprofit hospitals and how these hospitals make big profits because of tax breaks, charities, etc. “One thing that was missing was there was no impact,” he said, “nothing happened after the report.” He said he would go further and “go after these guys (nonprofit system abusers) and present what should’ve been done, the solutions.” Then he and Borowski asked about the paper’s data sources. Nelson said that with the data that they could find for Milwaukee, they could create a “landing page” about Milwaukee hospitals. Borowski said Wisconsin has some big hospitals and a similar investigation could be eye-opening, especially about nonprofits and how they manage money, taxes, etc. He said it would especially be good if they investigated patient-level costs.

Members of the watchdog team try to attend conferences related to their reporting or web presence, an area that they have made a priority and talk about at every meeting. During another monthly meeting, for example, they talked about optimizing the watchdog unit’s web presence and some tips to increase the stories’ web traffic. One of

the reporters handed out a paper summarizing suggestions she gathered from a National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, or NICAR, conference on the issue. The suggestions included best practices for different search methods, specific search engines other than Google, various websites and programs to help reporters find information, and the ways to improve the paper's "social media" presence. As one of their web producers, Jennifer Amur, advised in an earlier conversation, Borowski said, it is important to write better hashtags. The reporters who were presenting the topic said they would send an email including the links they suggested. They suggested checking some of the links from the handout, for example, GovLoop, a social network for government officials. One of the reporters said it might be a good idea to put someone in charge of their "social media" presence (tags, hashtags, blogs, tweets, etc., related to a watchdog series). Stanley said everyone should contribute to the "digital flow": "Everyone should be responsible and contribute to the optimization process." He also talked about possibly redesigning the watchdog unit's presence on JSOnline.com so it could be more central. Borowski said it is important to build a better web presence and increase traffic to watchdog stories. He said they should learn what others are doing and test ideas to see which work and which do not.

During weekly meetings on specific projects, the same brainstorming process continues, this time on a more practical and concrete level. For example, which photos will be used, which kind of data sets they should also check, and who else should be interviewed. If it is the first meeting on a project, the weekly meetings usually start with the reporter's presentation of a story that they recently decided to pursue and turn into a project. While the reporter presents the story, Borowski usually hands out a memo that

outlines the project. If the project is further along, the reporter at the beginning of the meeting informs the team with the latest update. Then the web producer or the multimedia producer shows what he or she coded so far for the project's web presence on a TV screen that is connected to a Mac computer. The TV, which they call the Mac TV, is across from a rectangular meeting table, directly across from the head of the table, where Borowski usually sits. After the web presentation, Allan Vestal, a programmer, presents his graphics, which are usually interactive. The photographer and the videographer then present what they have so far for the story. Then, close to the publication date, the print designers also show their designs. During these presentations, the members of the project team give their feedback. During the digital design presentation, the conversation usually is limited to the digital producers, Stanley and Borowski; when it comes to the print design, discussion is much more lively and more people contribute. This is also related to another division, this time between the young, newly hired, tech-savvy journalists and the veteran journalists, who comprise the majority of the newsroom and are trying to learn new technologies in order to keep their jobs. I will discuss this later. At the end of every meeting, the team members also get together in groups for mini meetings. These mini meetings continue throughout the production process not only after the meetings but also separately during the reporting process.

Although beat reporters aren't precluded from pursuing their own investigative story ideas, the fact that they are mostly excluded from the watchdog team's operations creates natural obstacles. Richards talked about the disadvantages of being outside of the watchdog team while pursuing a long-term investigative series. Emphasizing the lack of

staffing and resources, she said she could not work on the number of story ideas she had and was able to work on only one or two; one of them materialized because of funding they received from a Marquette University fellowship program. They used the funds to hire an intern to work on daily reports so that Richards could spend more time on her project. Another big problem, Richards said, arises in collecting and interpreting the data needed for a project. She gave an example of how one of her recent investigative story ideas stagnated because of the “complications with getting data.” She was trying to dig into an in-depth story about student-on-adult violence in schools, but she explained that the story is no longer moving forward because of the lack of clearly established datasets on the issue, the lack of training and expertise on her side, and the lack of outside help to deal with the data. But Richards still believes that with enough time and resources she would be more focused and would be able to finish the project. Without having enough time, resources or training, she said, “[T]he temptation is when it’s difficult you go for the easy prey, which is the story you can bang up the next day or satisfy the editor that comes to your desk and needs a weekend story” (Richards, April 18, 2013).

Kissinger also pointed out the tensions and challenges in the newsroom that have arisen because there is a separate watchdog team. After noting that watchdog reporting takes a lot of time and money, she also emphasized daily deadlines and the daily workload for beat reporters who have to “put out a newspaper every day.”

[S]o I sit next to a guy who is writing two or three or sometimes four stories in one day. And then here’s me working on something for six or seven or eight months and so there is a lot of inequity in the newsroom in terms of work product (Kissinger, March 25, 2013).

She said that she has a lot of respect and empathy for the daily reporters because she also worked as a beat reporter before the creation of the watchdog team; although everyone knows the two groups are very different operations, the difference in work schedules still creates a challenge in the newsroom. Kissinger said she still hears complaints and “grumblings” (Kissinger, March 25, 2013).

In Richards’ ideal setup, reporters on the watchdog team would rotate, either as a whole or just a handful of reporters, and the paper would have more reporters to fill in for the reporters who shift into the projects rotation.

I think there should be a rotation on it because I think being on the team just gets you more support and more, there is a little bit more direction. I think it’s easy to be forgotten about, even though I think that labels are a bit silly, but you do get more attention when you’re on the watchdog team. There’s just a built-in system for it (Richards, April 18, 2013).

Silverstein had the same solution in mind: “Why not rotate people in and out of sections? Give someone a chance to show them they could be part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team” (Silverstein, April 24, 2014). Recognizing that her beat—education—also lends itself to in-depth watchdog reporting, and expressing her willingness to work more on investigative projects, Richards said she recently almost left the paper for another job in another state because she was not able to work more on projects at the *Journal Sentinel*. She decided to stay in Milwaukee after she made an agreement with the newspaper.

[T]he agreement was I’m going to stay, but I need more time to focus some of these big stories. So I’m getting more time, but I also need a little bit more guidance, too, so whether that is, do I need officially be on the watchdog team? They probably don’t want to do that, but I do need some of the resources of the watchdog team, which is not just time but also some, like, extra training and extra help (Richards, April 18, 2013).

She was not hopeful for a change in the setup in the near future.

I don't think it's going to change. I mean, I agreed to stay, and I knew that this would happen when I agreed to stay, but I think that the best they can do with this position is to just focus more on having this position be more watchdog-like and pushing that, even if you're not on the team, being more supportive as an editor and saying, instead of being an editor who comes to say what do you have for tomorrow, it should be, you know, how is the project going today. And not asking you to jump in for a thing for tomorrow, and that's really hard thing to do when you're in the daily hot seat. So I don't think it will change. I don't think they can hire another reporter. I think what they can do as a system of editors is to say some positions need to be, you need to go to that well fewer times when you need something for the next day's paper (Richards, April 18, 2013).

According to Borowski, the current editor of the watchdog unit, the reason behind the decision to become a watchdog-centered newspaper is twofold: "One: You have to give readers something distinctive, and you have brand yourself so they know that's where they can get this reporting you can't get anywhere else. And two: It's just part of the public service function of reporters and newspapers." Historically, he said, that is "the role that the media has to play." And according to him, today that's the only way to be distinctive because "there is so many more avenues and information out there for people, it means that anybody can find a lot of it." The *Journal Sentinel* wanted to brand itself as the place that people can find "information they can't get anywhere else."

So you can go a lot of places to get the football scores or the weather or whatever. You can't go a lot of places to say, here is an investigation into all the police officers on the force that have been arrested, punished for violating laws and misdemeanors, because no one else is going to put the resources in to do that. So if you give the people unique information, that's a way to hold onto the franchise and hold on to the readers and viewers. . . . You need to give people something unique so it's not just average everyday stuff (Borowski, April 12, 2013).



Highlighting the changes in the economy and the newspaper industry, Kissinger, a member of the watchdog team as a health and welfare reporter who wrote the “Imminent Danger” series, said the “old model” was no longer sustainable.

Once the newspapers went online, we were giving it away for free, and ads left, you know, advertisers left in droves, and there were things like Craigslist . . . so that annihilated our classified advertising revenue. And so you couldn’t keep that old model; that model was blown up. So we had to re-build ourselves in more relevant way for the modern era (Kissinger, April 11, 2012).

Emphasizing the same challenges, Gina Barton, a law enforcement reporter on the team who wrote the “Both Sides of the Law” series and who exposed the actions of police officers in the death of Derek Williams (“Deaths in Detention),” said it was a conscious choice to focus more heavily on investigative reporting amid new competition stemming from new technologies:

With the decline of the traditional newspaper, . . . we’re starting to search for, what can a newspaper do that no one else can do. And they decided to focus on two things: one was quick-hit breaking news, you know, updating the blog, telling people what’s going on every second of every day, and then the second thing is in-depth, explanatory and investigative reporting . . . (Barton, April 12, 2012).

Barton pointed out that carrying out only the first option was the cheaper, easier way to move forward. “With the advent of the new technology,” she said, many other newspapers chose to “cut their investigative reporting . . . that’s how they were going to deal with the new technology.” But the *Journal Sentinel* chose to redefine itself as a watchdog journal: “That was one of the things that it’s going to keep people reading the *Journal Sentinel* and it’s going to keep our paper alive, you know, if they know that they are going to be able read this kind of stuff here,” Barton said (Barton, April 12, 2012).

Crocker Stephenson, a reporter who does watchdog reporting but not as a member of the watchdog unit and was the lead reporter on the “Empty Cradles” series, sees the transition process as a result of a conscious editorial decision to use the paper’s “ability” and “vitality” because the newspaper has “the biggest lungs in town.” So the newspaper decided to use its resources in a more efficient way to do better journalism than papers that, for instance, “put some woman with big breasts on Page 2 every day. . . . There are ways to save ourselves by doing crap, but we’re not going to do that. If we’re going to survive, we’re going to survive because we’re doing good . . .” According to Stephenson, watchdog journalism “may not be the way out” of the current crisis, “but it is the right thing to do. And so, I think that’s why we do it” (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

The journalists seem to agree that new technologies have played an important role in the transition from covering everything to redefining themselves as a watchdog journal. Borowski says technological changes made investigative reporting easier and more effective: “Many more people have much more power to do good reporting today than they did” (Borowski, April 12, 2013). Barton thinks reporting is harder now because the story doesn’t end after publication; it continues to develop in cyberspace, and now reporters have to follow the story’s journey in the interactive arena (Barton, April 12, 2012). Nevertheless, they assess the changes that new technologies have brought into their newsroom as positive. Referring to new media, Kissinger says, “It frees you up, you know, you pick your battles, you pick your spots, and you don’t spend so much time covering every school board meeting and looking at every court filing.” This reduction in coverage at the same time has cost many journalists their jobs, but Kissinger says this was also a positive change:

It's so different. I've been a reporter for 32 years, so I've seen you know really kind of the end of the old era of a bloated newspapers with lots of reporters and people kind of lazy in their jobs, and now we are bare-bones, we are down to a much smaller staff, a more nimble staff (Kissinger, April 11, 2012).

According to Stephenson,

There's nobody left except good reporters. . . . Everybody else is gone. . . . Those people would fill up the paper with their own stuff that was pretty mediocre. But the people that are left are better reporters, and so the paper doesn't have room for garbage anymore (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

Serge Halimi's argument (2009) about not questioning media companies' policies and the content they produced when they were making larger profits perhaps makes sense not only when people blame new technologies for the current crisis in journalism but also when it comes to the lack of solidarity among journalists.

On the other hand, Crowe, the recently hired data journalist, argues that in order to do better journalism, the newspaper has to stop cutting newsroom jobs and instead needs to fill in open positions. Crowe noted that all project design, app development and digital project production was the responsibility of three newly hired journalists—Emily Yount, Allan Vestal, and Jennifer Amur—at the time of our interview. In 2014, two of those three, Yount and Amur, left the paper. They both went to the *Washington Post* in 2014—Yount as an interaction designer and Amur as tablet/mobile editor. Crowe also pointed out the open positions in beat reporting, too. “[T]hose positions that are currently open, what are we going to do with those? You've got a Steve Schultze that just took the buyout. He's the county reporter. You've got to have a county reporter. There's no way around it. You need it. People need to know” (Crowe, June 10, 2014). Never-ending cuts in newsroom jobs not only reduce the breadth of the news coverage but also increase the

workload for the rest. Many beat reporters, copy editors and producers complain about their workload.

## **Chapter V**

### **Veterans and Newbies: Technology and Audience**

Another division in the newsroom is between the tech-savvy, newly hired, young journalists and newsroom veterans who spent most of their careers doing old-school reporting and now are trying to learn new technologies to survive in the newsroom. Young, newly hired journalists' approach to their work and the community also differ from the veteran journalists. In an attempt to reduce the technology gap between the two groups, the paper has offered training programs, but almost every veteran journalist that I encountered has some degree of difficulty using new technologies and techniques not only in their reporting but also in their daily lives. Over the past several years, the newspaper has placed increasing importance on its online, digital existence. The dichotomy is visible even within the watchdog team. For example, although more time and effort are devoted to the project's online visualization than its print counterpart, veteran watchdog reporters become more enthusiastic and participatory during the print discussions. When it comes to the online presentation, the discussion is among and lead by only a few newly hired journalists. Others usually show their astonishment or try to understand how these new technologies work when it comes to the online presentation. One can sense how overwhelmed the veterans are with the knowledge of the newly hired journalists and the tasks that the paper expects them to fulfill like blogging, tweeting and participating in online chat sessions.

According to Stanley, encouraging watchdog reporters to blog, tweet and participate in online chats is also part of the paper's strategy to keep watchdog journalists

active in daily operations. Kissinger pointed out this strategy when asked how the paper is integrating the watchdog and daily/beat reporting operations:

There is a lot of pressure on the watchdog people now to blog more, . . . be more visible and have stuff in more often, if not the printed newspaper, then our online and blogs and stuff. So they don't want us just sitting back, and I mean there is pressure for us to produce as well (Stanley, April 12, 2013).

Emily Yount, a recent graduate who was hired as a multimedia producer in 2011 and who was coding interactive graphics for investigative series before she left the paper in 2014, pointed out the age differences in the newsroom and how veteran journalists perceive their newly hired, young coworkers. According to Yount, a lot of people in the newsroom have the "perspective like, 'Oh my gosh, you're the young person that knows all those things,' and 'You have so much to teach me,' and don't realize how much they have to teach us, too." When asked about the challenges during the news production process, Yount talked about the difficulties that veteran journalists face as they try to adapt to the digital aspects of the reporting process.

Sometimes the text stuff or the social media stuff or the blogging is kind of more seen as this thing "I have to get done," "this thing that's on my list," rather than something is helpful to the reader or will increase engagement and will end up helping up your reporting. I think people who can see things like social media and blogging as a way to connect to readers and as a way to improve their own process, they're the ones that are going to love it and they're going to benefit from it, rather than just feeling like this is the thing I have to get done before I get to my real job. So I think that's what you encounter sometimes. . . . And I think that's changing (Yount, April 10, 2013).

All reporters are encouraged to use smartphones, take pictures while reporting, and use social media. But most veteran journalists are still having problems using digital devices and technologies. The newspaper encourages reporters to use new media, especially to increase web traffic and the impact of the story. During a meeting,

Borowski, the projects editor, asked a veteran investigative reporter, Raquel Rutledge, to explain a recent social media strategy that succeeded in driving web traffic. Rutledge said they targeted some specific people who hold influential positions in their fields and have a relatively large number of followers on Twitter, and she explained how some of them have picked up their tweets, either tweeting out the story or re-tweeting the initial tweet. Fox News also picked up the story. They were really satisfied with how effective this strategy was and also how they received clicks via Facebook. Rutledge credited Jennifer Amur, one of the web/multimedia producers, on the targeted tweet strategy. Borowski, Rutledge and Stanley also talked about how Facebook allows users to write more about a link and about how the large number of “likes” and “shares” kept the story high on users’ newsfeeds, driving more traffic from Facebook to JSOnline.com. Most of them commented about how they need to have better search optimization and a better social media strategy, especially for major investigative projects. Yount, Borowski and Stanley talked about creating more topic-based pages like the “Crime” page as a way to boost search-engine optimization. The topic-based pages they discussed are data-driven landing pages that update automatically based on data scraped from governmental websites. During these conversations, veteran journalists usually expressed their astonishment about technology while young, newly hired journalists led meetings, especially the presentation discussions. During another meeting, a reporter explained the advantages of using programs like Google’s Fusion Tables to create better maps and graphics. He said it would be useful not only to have what people say on social media but also the locations of tweets and posts. He said that although people usually turn off location services on Facebook, they tend not to disable that feature on Twitter. He noted that there are

programs that allow users to see where other people were tweeting from and where they took their photos; they can even see deleted tweets, he said. Kissinger, amazed by these facts, asked questions to understand how these programs work. Some of the others in the group laughed when she said, “Wow, I’m freaked out.”

The voices of young journalists achieve some level of authority during the meetings because of their technical knowledge. When the newspaper for the first time used responsive design for a watchdog project called “A Time to Build,” newly hired journalists’ leadership was visible during the meetings. Visually, the page was radically different than all of the newspaper’s other web pages. The whole discussion about the visualization of the project during weekly meetings progressed only between Amur, the multimedia producer who coded the page; Allan Vestal, the programmer; and Stanley and Borowski. Amur was leading the meetings while the others usually agreed and accepted her suggestions, not only for the page but also for other aspects of the project. From the beginning, the IT department was opposed to the idea of changing the design of the watchdog projects’ webpages to make it responsive and interactive. Organizationally and managerially, the newsroom and the IT operations are separate, which means their editors have equal power on these types of issues. The IT department produces and controls the template pages, and it appeared its representatives did not want to cede control over web design. Nevertheless, Borowski and Stanley gave the green light to Amur and Yount to develop the responsive template without informing IT department and they launched the page unilaterally, forcing the IT to accept the changes.

Coming from different cities or states fresh from journalism schools, the young, newly hired journalists’ sense of community differed from the veteran journalists, as did



their understanding of the meaning of watchdog reporting. Asked about the *Journal Sentinel*'s focus on watchdog reporting, web designer for the watchdog projects Yount was excited, confused and vague when describing the paper's strategy.

I think it's really interesting that we put that much emphasis on it, I think it's awesome, I think it's the best thing we could be doing for readers, you know, I want to know about these things that are happening that are discovered that you know no one else is going to be honest and tell, umm so I think it's a really great service and it's definitely one of those things that almost like a loss leader you know like it costs a lot when you actually talk about finances and things like that, that I think the benefits are maybe aren't seen in a monetary way, more seen in this way of like if we can keep doing this for people that they're going to value us and want to stick around, umm and I think umm [pauses] what I was going to say? [pauses] I guess I would say, too, that before working here I didn't even really realize, you know, that a lot of places are still doing this kind of work other than really huge places (Yount, April 10, 2013).

Although they were indifferent toward their and the paper's audiences, similar to their veteran co-workers, young journalists talked about how it is important to invest in local watchdog reporting and how the Milwaukee residents have a great sense of community. "I think one of the keys to our watchdog reporting is that it's hyper local, we're finding things that affect Milwaukee," Yount said. But before her short Milwaukee career, she told me that she wasn't even aware of the *Journal Sentinel*'s existence (she is from North Carolina and went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill):

I was applying for all sorts of full-time jobs, this is I think the only internship I applied for when I was looking for a job, and it was just that I saw it and I never heard this place. I actually knew nothing about the Midwest, I didn't even really know where Milwaukee was, which is really embarrassing... but I started looking at the website and I started looking what kind of things they were writing about, and I was like, oh my gosh this is amazing that they're spending time on this kind of stuff you know considering the size, considering the number of people (Yount, April 10, 2013).

Although she was hired as a multimedia producer and graphics designer for watchdog projects shortly after graduating, she was also trying to learn the job from a veteran print designer. Her knowledge of the intricacies of new technologies wasn't enough when it came to making her work publication-ready. She explained how she changed her work based on feedback from the print graphics editor. "Because, you know, Lou has been doing this for 20 something years and I've been doing it for one" (Yount, April 10, 2013).

Most of the newly hired journalists were inexperienced, the result of the deliberate change in *Journal Sentinel's* employment patterns. After the buyouts and layoffs in 2009, the paper started to replace experienced journalists, who cost more and were harder to manage, with young and relatively inexperienced journalists, who cost less and are easier to manage. According to Silverstein, because veteran journalists have been there for a long time, their relationships with middle and upper management are a little different as they feel more free to express their objections and ideas. And because of that standing, managers were more likely to listen to them. Young people, on the other hand, are "less likely to fight back," Silverstein said.

[I]t's not because young people are dumb or anything; they just don't have the experience. They haven't been around, and they're not as confident, where, if I see something that I'm like, Mike—my boss's name is Mike—this isn't very efficient, it's not working, let's, I'm just going to tell that I think it's not working. And he's going to listen. But, you know, a young person's not going to have the confidence to go in and say that (Silverstein, April 24, 2014).

Although veteran journalists are more experienced and confident in their relationships with their bosses, they couldn't prevent the company from using buyouts to change employment patterns. Because they are heavily invested in the *Journal Sentinel*

and their lives in Milwaukee, they're also afraid of "fighting back" when threatened with layoffs. According to Silverstein, although the company cannot force anyone to take a buyout, it can deny anyone's application. But more importantly, a few years ago, the company was able to negotiate a change in the union contract's severance policies. The new language requires only one week of pay per year of service, instead of the previous standard of two weeks of pay per year of service. As an incentive for more veteran journalists to take the buyout, the company offered the two-week deal in the buyouts. However, if journalists didn't take the buyout, they could be laid off and receive only the one-week package. Afraid of getting laid off or being unable to get the same severance package, many long-time employees ended up taking the buyout. After the company rid itself of many older, high-cost employees, it often would hire young journalists who've just graduated from school "at half price." According to Silverstein, the company is willing to take that "one-time hit" for the buyout, but in long-run, it will "come out much, much better" because the company either won't fill the position, or will hire someone for half the salary and with benefits that cost less (Silverstein, April 24, 2014).

While older reporters tended to emphasize the newspaper's role in "the community" and making it a better place to live when talking about why watchdog journalism was important, younger journalists tended to talk about increasing readership by creating loyalty and keep people engaged. For example, according to Crowe, the paper needs to keep people engaged in order to make money, whereas Stephenson talks about how journalists are part of the community and they try to make it "better." Or, for example, according to Rutledge, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning watchdog reporter, she prefers to work part-time because she doesn't want to lose her daily interactions with the

community. This is also related to the young journalists' emphasis on presentation while the older reporters worry more about the content. For the young reporters, the paper should concentrate and invest more in presentation, especially mobile presentation, in order to survive and keep the readers engaged. Crowe, Yount, Amur and Richards all talked about how today it is more important to provide content with a better, clean and easy presentation on mobile platforms. They emphasize how writing for mobile platforms is different than writing for desktop platforms, which is even more different than writing for print. Crowe cited a well-known news programmer to make the point: "If it doesn't work on mobile, it doesn't work" (Crowe, June 10, 2014).

Nevertheless, both inexperienced and veteran journalists, for the most part, agree with their editors' and managers' approach to the watchdog strategy: give readers something they can't get anywhere else. Another commonality is agreement on defining what makes a watchdog story. They explain their reasons more or less the same way, seeing it as a standardized, routinized process. Stanley, the managing editor, pointed out that after they created the watchdog team, they wrote-up a memo that explains how they "decide to delve into a project" (Stanley, April 12, 2013).

The *Journal Sentinel* reporters' standards for picking a story worth reporting converge on the point of seeking accountability. As most of their stories emerge from tips and examining databases, according to Borowski, when they are choosing stories they focus on "the most important ones" and importance depends on "how many people are affected, how egregious is the situation, what change can be prompted by us writing about it. Who is accountable or responsible for what we are writing about?" (Borowski, April 12, 2013). To find answers to these questions, they position themselves according

to the law, Kissinger points out “[W]hat I’ve done many times is gone back and looked at how is something supposed to happen. So, how is the law written?” She cites a series that began in 2007 on the use of harmful chemicals, especially Bisphenol A, in various products being used on a daily basis. Kissinger said that rather than explore whether it is a dangerous chemical—“because that would take you forever to explain, and you get really strong opinions on both sides and it wouldn’t be very clear to the reader”—they looked at how the government assesses the safety of this chemical (Kissinger, April 11, 2012). The emphasis on the law coincides Ettema and Glasser’s findings about how the law is “usually the most concrete, even if not always the most compelling, standard for the objectification of moral judgments” (1998, 72). According to the authors, journalists use the law and legal standards not only against criticism but also to avoid responsibility for making decisions about morality (73).

Stanley used Dave Umhoefer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning, six-month investigation into the Milwaukee County pension system as an example to explain how they decide to pursue a project. “After looking at the data, the key question here was, ‘Is there a special county good old boy network for pensions?’” He added that if somebody is being harmed because of some wrongdoing, inefficiency or misuse of public funds, then they look for who is accountable (Stanley, April 12, 2013). Emphasizing the importance of accountability in watchdog journalism, Borowski said: “What you want to do is to get a clear line from victim to villain so that you can tell the reader here who is accountable and not just describe a problem.” He also describes watchdog reporting more as accountability journalism than advocacy (Borowski, April 12, 2013). According to the reporters, watchdog journalism is by its nature adversarial; holding someone accountable

for a wrongdoing is an inseparable part of it. The *Journal Sentinel* specifically looks for bad guys who can be held accountable. Moreover, misuse of taxpayers' money and public funds are what they are looking for when exploring a story idea. In a weekly meeting on March 14, Rutledge talked about her investigation into the abuse of a benefits system by a wealthy woman. According to Rutledge's inquiry, the woman owns \$2.5 million in rental properties in Shorewood and east Milwaukee, yet received more than \$200,000 in subsidies in the last seven years. After Rutledge summarized how this old Jewish woman was "gaming with the benefits system," the focal point was the woman and how she manipulated the system and how the taxpayers' money was being wasted. The reporters in the room asked questions about the legal details and details about the woman, her age, if she had kids, where she lived, in what kind of house she lived, etc. They tossed around ideas about how they could prove she was abusing the system by looking and combining different records from different government agencies and how they could point out the weaknesses of the system. One of the reporters asked Rutledge how she found out about her. Rutledge answered, "From a tip." Another reporter asked Rutledge how she learned about the woman's income, since there is no official record of her income from property ownership. Rutledge said that she knocked on the doors of houses that the woman owns and asked the renters how much they pay each month. Rutledge, during the meeting, explained why she had not talked with her yet: "Marina is a hostile old woman and in past accused and sued people with anti-Semitism whenever someone tried to bring her to account on her situation."

Toward the end of the meeting, only after Yount asked whether there were any studies or data on how many people are abusing the system using loopholes or how many

people get caught did the group start to think about the whole taxation and pension system. Borowski said that if they could find more examples then it could be a problem with the system. Rutledge said there were and that she could compile more stories about manipulation “since there is no shortage of them.” Yount also asked if they knew anyone who works in the system and if they could also learn how the system works from that source. Raquel said, “Yes, plenty.” One of the reporters asked about the Internal Revenue Service. Rutledge said they were never after her. Crowe then commented, “That won’t be the case anymore!” The watchdog team uses the woman, the villain, as a way of getting to the larger, systemic problem: Her abuse of the system indicates there are larger, systemic problems that allowed her to get away with it.

Reporters outside of the watchdog team also use the same “bad guys” and “misuse of public funds” rhetoric when they describe the paper’s watchdog series. When describing the differences between explanatory stories and watchdog stories, Richards said that if the story has these two features, then it is more watchdog than explanatory (Richards, April 18, 2013).

This is the formula the watchdog team follows: If there is a victim that needs to be advocated for, then there should also be a villain to hold accountable. It is not the system but the people who execute it that are the problem, according to that logic. Although the reporters and editor I interviewed seemed to embrace this logic as a helpful mechanism in choosing stories, it is one of the limitations of the watchdog reporting that the *Journal Sentinel* adopts. It is a limitation because if there is not a person or group to hold accountable, then it is difficult if not impossible for them to tackle that issue. On the other hand, it is easier to investigate a case that has, in Borowski’s words, “a clear line from

victim to villain” (Borowski, April 12, 2013). For instance, for an investigative reporter who thinks there has to be villain, a potential misuse of tuition fees by a university is worth reporting and would be a good example of watchdog journalism. But faced with the problem of unfairly high tuition fees, where the whole education system is responsible, the investigative reporter also needs to question the power relations, which not only fails to pass the victim-villain test but also is hard to report. Kissinger’s project “Chronic Crisis,” a product of a partnership with Marquette University, for example, evolved during the reporting process into a series about the whole mental healthcare system in Milwaukee from a mental health patient’s death in the psychiatric emergency room. The project kept being delayed as new angles were added, and it required more time and resources. Kissinger expressed her frustration with the story at every turn, saying it was the toughest one in her career despite the fact that she has been reporting on mental health issues for years. During the meetings, our interview and our conversations, she mentioned the hard time she was having while writing the story: “I have to confess to you that I’m really struggling more on this story than I have on anything I’ve ever done.” While frequently praising the journalism that she and the paper are doing during our interviews, toward the end of our last interview, when we focused on her project, she even expressed her frustration with the whole watchdog approach:

It’s just they put the word watchdog next to it. That’s cute because they can have a little logo with the dog. . . . I mean, it’s OK, [pauses] you know, these are valuable questions to ask, I’m just being whiny about it because I’m having a hard time, but thank you for your patience with me on that (Kissinger, March 25, 2013).

Faced with problems like the “very clogged” emergency room, pressures on doctors and the poor quality of mental health care—where the whole mental health care



system bears responsibility—Kissinger also needed to question the power relations, which not only failed to pass the victim-villain test but also was hard to report. “So, it’s been very challenging trying to get your arms around that system, because it’s a huge system, and it’s mired in lots of problems” (Kissinger, March 25, 2013).

The three-part series first identified the problems and then offered solutions based on the laws, regulations and the practices that, according to the empirical data, work better in cities like Madison, Houston and states like Iowa, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The series provided “who to contact” lists of officials and representatives for a particular failure of the system. (For example, one of the offered solutions was to change the county’s “24-hour rule” to hold a patient who refuses treatment to 72 hours based on the data that this was the standard for most of the countries. After explaining the reasons behind this particular solution, the paper listed Republican and Democratic representatives who chair the Speaker’s Task Force on Mental Health). The last part of the series focused on the profiles of those who died “while waiting for improvements” in the county’s mental health system. The paper and the series rallied support from a wide range of organizations, practitioners and families for a change in the system. The reporting prompted changes in law and won the prestigious 2014 Polk Award for investigative reporting, the *Journal Sentinel*’s fifth in the past six years.

Reliance on existing common sense, moral order, laws and regulations while advocating for change is a result of what Proffess, et al., point out in *The Journalism of Outrage* when they say, “Investigative reporters are reformers not revolutionaries” (1991, 5).

They seek to improve the American system by pointing out its shortcomings rather than advocating its overthrow. By spotlighting specific abuses of particular

policies or programs, the investigative reporter provides policy makers with the opportunity to take corrective actions without changing the distribution of power (Protest, et. al 1991, 11).

While investigative journalism is generally viewed “as a way of waking citizens up to their political responsibilities,” Thomas C. Leonard points out the paradox related with the press’ watchdog role in the Progressive era: There was a decline in overall political participation in America “as this reporting gained strength” (1986, 184). Watchdog journalism has also become a “vital source of self-esteem and discipline in a profession that had neither an educational requirement nor a license by the state” (Leonard 1986, 222). In other words, this “anomalous” characteristic led the profession to justify itself in performing a watchdog role in the public’s name, “but in which the public plays no role, except as an audience ...” (Carey 1997, 247).

The *Journal Sentinel*’s definition of victim-villain watchdog journalism carries over to how it labels “Empty Cradles,” an advocacy series about Milwaukee’s infant mortality rates that the newspaper does not consider to be watchdog reporting. Stephenson, the lead reporter on the series, says the story is not watchdog journalism because “watchdog journalism seeks to find, seeks to solve a problem by holding someone accountable.” This time it was the whole system, “... but this was a different kind of journalism than the traditional watchdog journalism where you’re looking for a bad guy because the responsibility for the solution was so diffuse that we couldn’t just point to one guy and say, you need to do a better job” (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

The newspaper does not have a problem with pushing for change as much as it can; with “Empty Cradles,” the paper printed how-to guides for new mothers and posted videos online of safe-sleeping methods. In other series, it provides the contact

information for officials who are responsible for a wrongdoing or legislators who can be contacted about an issue. As Kissinger puts it, they are “giving readers the tools to exercise their democracy” (Kissinger, April 11, 2012). *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* watchdog reporters do not believe their role should end after reporting a story. If there is a “wrongdoing,” they are committed to continue calling the public’s attention to it until it is fixed or the villains pay for it. As I mentioned before, the paper publishes follow-up impact stories, it pushes and looks for action from authorities, and sometimes it directly tells readers what they should do in order to reduce the “disorder” it points out. All of the reporters interviewed measure their success by the impact and change they prompt by their stories. They draw the line in favor of active adversarialism rather than detached observation when they describe their role as a catalyst for change. Kissinger points out the importance of exerting public pressure through follow-up impact stories to push for change:

Just continuing to point out, you know, what we found and showing the weaknesses in the law and trying to get people to remedy those . . . we continue to exert pressure with more stories. . . .we keep the drumbeat going by printing more stories about the need for that, and so we exert some public pressure (Kissinger, April 11, 2012).

When Stephenson describes how the team started working on the infant mortality series, he says their motivation was to help the community reduce the rates rather than just painting a picture of what was happening in the city. When they found out that some parts of city had an infant mortality rate that was about the same as in the Gaza Strip, Stephenson said that from the beginning “the idea was always not just to point out that Milwaukee has this problem but that there are simple solutions and complicated solutions but there are solutions to this problem and that these are what those solutions are”

(Stephenson, April 20, 2012). He said he thinks only identifying a problem is not enough and that newspapers should not stop there for the sake of objectivity because journalists, too, have a responsibility to their community. According to him, newspapers can take a leadership role, especially for issues in which “the people who are impacted the most are poor and disenfranchised. And those are the people that a newspaper can fight for because a newspaper has the biggest lungs in town.” Stephenson believes that good journalism should “continue to push for improvement”; identifying a problem is only the first step, he says:

I don't think it's enough to say this is a problem. And I don't think it's also even enough to say and here are some solutions. I think you also have to say, OK, so who is doing these solutions? And if somebody tries to solve the problem, I think we're responsible for following that person or people and reporting what their success or lack of success might be. I think we have a responsibility to ask our politicians and our people in charge of public health: What are you doing? And what has changed? And what are you going to do to make things better? And I don't think that it's a partisan issue, or that there's anything wrong with advocating improvement in our culture. And that's where I think sometimes watchdog journalism fails (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

According to him, journalists are also members of the community and are “not impartial to the health and wellbeing of the community” (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

But the *Journal Sentinel* reporters do draw a line when it comes to advocating a way to fix a wrongdoing. According to Borowski, the newspaper's objectivity stays intact when it continues to push for change after publishing a story, and even when it encourages people to show their outrage, but its reputation as an objective source would be hurt if it advocates for a particular solution. After saying journalists need to remain objective, he adds:

You want things to change and improve, you'll get in trouble if you advocate only a particular way to do it, or only this side is right, and I want that specific reaction

to happen. As much as, you know, if you highlight a problem you want to get the problem fixed. I think people, you know, you would get into trouble with your objectivity and your perception among readers if it was like, well, here's 10 ways to solve this problem, and all we're doing is writing about this one problem, this one approach and not recognizing the others (Borowski, April 12, 2013).

Ellen Gabler, one of the young members of the watchdog team and the assistant editor of the unit, was the only journalist who defended the idea of absolute objectivity, rejected adversarial journalism and expressed her apathy about what she writes about except "accuracy." She is the perfect example of Tuchman's or Gan's Weberian newsroom in which journalists function as cogs in an industrial bureaucracy where routines produce texts and at the end "fail to address existing power relations adequately" (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 49). Objectivity, Gabler said, is something that "absolutely" can be achieved and that's all matters for her reporting:

I don't actually give a shit about most of the stuff, I don't care about most of the stuff that I write about in terms of what happens either way. I'm writing about it, that's different than advocate. An advocate is somebody who is ummm... you know like a nutrition advocate, you know they [are] really into that, or somebody who is like a prisoner rights advocate. They can't really see the other side. . . . You know, I don't really care. And so I'm constantly trying to make sure the things that I'm writing are accurate, and I'm portraying the reality of the situation as best I can.

Gabler in 2014 won several national awards, including the Livingston Award for young journalists, in part of her role in the "Deadly Delays" investigation, which found that newborn screenings at hospitals and state agencies across the country were often late. The story actually came from another reporter, a beat reporter, in the newsroom. But she got involved because, she said, as an investigative reporter, she can analyze data. When asked about her data analysis process, she talked about using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access.

Describing her type of journalism as advocacy journalism, in the sense that watchdog journalism is inevitably adversarial, Barton draws a similar line to Borowski's, and said "it's not necessarily an advocate for a certain person or a certain position" (Barton, April 12, 2012). Borowski explains how the newspaper decides to present solutions to a problem; in some cases, showing how other cities approach the case is an important factor:

Now if that's what you are doing [advocating one of the presented solutions], you better be able to show, well, here is why, you know, that 10 other cities with much better records in this area all do it that way, and it's shown to be cost effective and whatever, so that people understand that and then can recognize you're just helping inform the debate and not saying, you know, do this specifically (Barton, April 12, 2012).

Most of the *Journal Sentinel* watchdog and beat reporters that I interviewed did not hesitate to describe their journalism as advocacy, and they contended that investigative reporting is adversarial by its nature. Kissinger, for example, says, "In a way it is advocacy because it's advocating for changes in the system. Looking for ways that the system is broken and trying to provide solutions for those problems, versus, say, covering an event. . ." (Kissinger, March 25, 2013). Barton describes her type of journalism similarly:

I think that a lot of reporters are afraid of that title 'advocacy journalism,' but if you think about it, what investigative reporting is, it's uncovering a wrong, or it's uncovering something that people want to keep secret. So it's uncovering crime, corruption, fraud, you know, waste something like that, and so always when we uncover something like that, we hope it will stop (Barton, April 12, 2012).

In her reporting, Barton claims she is advocating for the "voiceless" in the society. She cited as an example her story about a "19-year-old, inner city African-

American girl” who called the police after a fight and was raped by the cop who came to the area after her call.

And so somebody like that, you know, she told all these other police officers what happened, they didn’t believe her. . . . Who is going to listen to her? But she found a lawyer to listen to her and, but even then, she couldn’t really do anything. And so, somebody like that, it’s like I’m sticking up for her and I’m helping her get justice, but at the same time I’m holding accountable the police department, the district attorney’s office, everybody who should have helped her (Barton, April 12, 2012).

For Kissinger it is “the consumer, the citizen, the person who is in society and especially people in society who don’t really have the resources or the abilities to defend themselves” (Kissinger, April 11, 2013).

When it comes to their perceptions about who their audiences are, the reporters usually refer to a “common person,” independent of any social class or group, and they do not separate themselves from this “common person.” They do not think their knowledge and their power to decide which story they should report on or which story they should put in the paper makes a difference. Kissinger says she writes for the “common person.” If she can understand the story and is interested in it, then the “common person” can also understand it and be interested in it.

I never assume that people have a big background in something, so I always try to figure, I write for myself, really I mean that sounds selfish I don’t mean it that way, but if I’m interested in it and if I can understand it, then I try to write it in a pretty basic way, and so you know we write for the common person (Kissinger, April 11, 2012).

Stephenson talks about a “general reader.” When he describes his journalism as advocacy and why it should be adversarial, he says,

I personally take, when I sit down at my dinner table and look at my children, I feel, this is our community, this is where we live, this is a better community

because we worked on these stories. So my answer to you is, yes, I think we can advocate (Stephenson, April 20, 2012).

Barton talked about receiving a lot of hate emails, and said police officers and their families are definitely reading her. When asked whether she thinks about her audience while she's writing, she said:

Actually, I usually don't think about the audience that much when I'm writing it. That was a really interesting—maybe I will now. It's really interesting question. You know, obviously I want, the people that I most want to read it, are policymakers (Barton, April 12, 2012).

After describing his audience as himself, his neighbor and “everybody who lives in the community,” Borowski said he thinks the key factor is to have a diverse newsroom. Without taking the hiring process of the institution or highly standardized editing process for a story into account, he thinks if the newsroom is diverse enough they can reach everyone in the community.

The people you are writing for largely people like you. The challenge becomes if the newsroom isn't diverse enough, and everyone comes from one background or one community or one political point of view or, then if you try to write for the people like you, well, then by definition you're not writing for everybody so you want a good representative staff and make sure you have different points of view that you can argue and discuss and express and not just be like, well, we all agree it's no fun to work in a place where everybody is exactly the same (Borowski, April 12, 2013).

But, on the other hand, the newsroom and especially the decision making groups suffer from lack of diversity. Although the issue of diversity was not one of the main questions of this study, almost all journalists I interviewed and had a chance to chat with has complained about the middle-aged, white men dominant management and the lack of concrete efforts to change the situation—except Gabler.



## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

Faced with very real economic problems, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* sought to save itself by redefining its journalism, relying on and investing in new technologies, and restructuring the organization. These changes served to affirm that while investigative journalism might be the way to maintain reader loyalty, it is not guaranteed that this will result in advertising dollars or create a more harmonious workplace. The creation of a separate watchdog unit and using the renewed focus on investigative journalism to change employment patterns created divisions and tensions within the newsroom related to journalists' titles and ages. These divisions and the paper's redefinition of news in the face of jurisdictional disputes determine the scope of the paper's journalism.

For the *Journal Sentinel*, watchdog journalism comprises unique, data-driven investigative stories with a clearly identifiable antagonist that enables the paper to propose a solution to a problem and build its public-service brand by showcasing work done by expert journalists. If a case does not meet most, if not all, of these criteria it most likely would be seen as not being worthy of investigation. As a result, this redefinition of news plays a critical role in determining what information the public is exposed to. This redefinition also directs the journalists to mostly focus on and hold accountable public institutions and regulations rather than business. When a core definition of news calls on journalists to find solutions to public problems, it inherently puts the focus of attention of governmental regulatory agencies and whether government is meeting its goals. As a result, the *Journal Sentinel's* reporting usually confines itself to existing regulations,

laws, practices and values in order to justify its judgments and proposed solutions, hence helping to maintain established power relations within society as well as official versions of social reality. As Vincent P. Norris noted a long ago about the role of watchdog press in democratic society, “[T]he press is a watchdog that nips at the heels while carefully avoiding the jugular” (1982, 15).

The *Journal Sentinel* elected to rebrand itself as a watchdog newspaper, investing more in long-form, data-driven, investigative reporting, in response to changing market conditions and rapidly developing technologies. The transition process was implemented in an attempt to reinforce the newspaper’s dominance, to reclaim its jurisdiction in the local news market and maintain, if not increase, its readership by providing information not accessible anywhere else. Although the watchdog strategy served affirm that investigative journalism is the way to at least maintain the readership while cutting newsroom jobs and the scope of the news coverage, the fact that neither the newsroom nor the advertising department has a precise understanding of who comprises the paper’s audience might offer an understanding of why a renewed focus on watchdog reporting did not provide a way out of the economic crisis. The business side of the paper clearly was unclear about what the redefinition of news means and how to use it to attract advertising dollars, seeing even Green Bay Packers coverage as meeting the new definition of news.

While the redefinition changed what topics would be covered, it seems to have had little impact on the relationship between journalists and their audience. While technology has created the opportunity to know more about their audience, journalists still seem reluctant to head down that path. Much as earlier research has demonstrated,

journalists continue to have little to no idea about their audience, raising questions of participation and journalists' fear of and distrust for the audience when it comes to their news judgment and professional authority. Similar to Gans' findings (1980), most of the editors and reporters of the *Journal Sentinel* I interviewed described their audience as themselves or someone they know (a neighbor or relative), or they admitted that they didn't know much about their audience.

The paper's hope that a redefinition of news would lead to increased readership and advertising sales raises many questions. According to *The Dallas Morning News* publisher Jim Moroney, advertising is not the economic future of the industry. In addition to trying to find new streams of revenue in the forms of investments and acquisitions, the *Morning News* recently announced partnerships with *The New York Times* to sell a special section of the *Times* for an extra cost and a second paid supplement of *The Washington Post* to "see if readers will really pay for more content" (Celeste 2014). Moroney believes that "digital revenues will never grow fast enough to replace said declining print revenues" (Celeste 2014). The *Journal Sentinel's* experience of investing more in watchdog reporting might still provide a way out of the crisis in the profession as digital platforms make it easier for readers to get news elsewhere. When presented in an easy-to-navigate, platform-agnostic design, the *Journal Sentinel's* investigative series proved to attract big readership. Younger journalists that I interviewed also talked about the necessity of finding different ways to increase revenue. According to them, producing unique stories and selling them individually might become the way newspapers pay for their journalism. In this way, the *Journal Sentinel's* strategy to redefine journalism might be better viewed as an essential first step to identifying a way out of the economic crisis,

but the paper has failed to so far integrate its watchdog reporting into its efforts to increase revenue. As a result of the pending merger with E.W. Scripps, the *Journal Sentinel* currently is undergoing cuts that threaten not only its watchdog operation but also its existence as a whole. According to the Milwaukee Newspaper Guild, hundreds of years of institutional knowledge walked out the door as a result of the last round of buyouts and layoffs, and the remaining employees face an even more uncertain future with new corporate executives. As the creation of a separate watchdog unit and the change in employment patterns created a divided newsroom and tensions between journalists, solidarity within the newsroom became an issue. As some watchdog reporters attributed the change in communication technologies as the key catalyst for the transition toward watchdog journalism, they tended to blame the “mediocre” content that the newspaper printed in past years on their former colleagues. They praised the new era as good journalism without considering that in both eras they did what the company asked them to do.

Although the managers talked about their goal of creating an integrated newsroom, the redefinition did little to achieve that integration. Since the creation of the watchdog team, the newspaper not only has been struggling to cope with the reporting challenges inherent to investigative journalism, but it also has struggled with the problems the paper’s transition created. The newsroom is divided by journalists’ roles and titles (watchdog reporters and beat reporters); by age (longtime *Journal Sentinel* employees and a few newly hired, young journalists); and by knowledge of new technologies (older journalists who are either skeptical about new technologies or who struggle to learn enough to survive in the newsroom, and young, tech-savvy journalists

who enjoy the privilege of having knowledge of and experience with new technologies). Young journalists enjoy a level of authority as technological knowledge is treated as wisdom in the newsroom.

The approach to and use of technology is merely one difference between young and veteran journalists; the understanding of watchdog reporting and the community is another. Paired with buyouts that targeted veteran workers and beat reporters, these divisions fuel the tensions within the newsroom and in news-production processes. Despite its emphasis on investigative reporting, the paper continues to shrink the newsroom. The company used the new reporting strategy and the growth of technology in news to justify cutting costs by buying out veteran employees and hiring young, inexperienced, tech-savvy journalists. With every round of buyouts and layoffs, the paper is also losing journalists who possess the depth and range to benefit its news coverage at both the local and national level. Instead of relying on its own reporters, the newspaper is increasingly dependent on different outlets and wire agencies for that coverage. William Greider (1992) links *The Washington Post's* success under Benjamin C. Bradlee to its provocative news coverage targeting powerful institutions and figures, and aggressively expanding and deepening its newsroom (293) while others were adopting contrary strategies. Cutting newsroom jobs in order to cope with shrinking readership is a short-term, industry-wide strategy that in the long-term has been proven to fail. It is a vicious cycle, as cutting jobs in the long-term means less diverse coverage and in turn losing even more readership. Moreover, the merger deal with Scripps and the subsequent buyouts and layoffs have put the paper's future and its watchdog role in jeopardy. These transformations didn't change the top-down, hierarchical organizational structure of the

newsroom nor did they change the dominance of white, middle-aged men in decision-making groups. In fact, these changes in the employment pattern strengthened managerial control of the labor process and the commodification of labor in the newsroom. The paper tried to exert control not only in the local media market by adopting expensive information technologies and rebranding itself as watchdog-centric journal, but it also exerted control in the newsroom by implementing managerially controlled technologies that enabled it to extend labor monitoring, to rapidly change employment patterns, to increase the re-skilling and de-skilling of its workers, and to commodify labor.

The paper was trying to redefine what traditional journalism should look like in the face of the industry's economic crisis and increasing threats to journalism's jurisdictional control. The reporters I interviewed believe their stories will help improve their community or play a role in sparking an active debate in the public sphere; they hope at least it will increase loyalty and readership. The journalists' definition of news and news values has important implications on what we read and know about. While transcending the traditional tensions between "moral custodianship and moral disengagement" (Ettema and Glasser 1998) in favor of active adversarialism—or advocacy—the paper still clings to objectivity by establishing new guidelines for how stories advocate for a solution or for change. In order to avoid criticism and acquire justification for their judgments, the newspaper confines itself to existing regulations, laws, practices and values, hence helping the reproduction of existing power relations and the official version of social reality.

The journalists I interviewed talked about how they have the necessary means, resources and expertise to do data-driven, watchdog journalism and how others, such as

bloggers and citizen journalists, lack these resources. While this means redefining the jurisdictional borders of journalism through watchdog reporting as a journalism of performance and retreating from jurisdictional claims over covering the daily news as a journalism of craft, during my observations the way journalists decide what the public should know has more to do with their values and how they define news rather than methodological differences between other occupational groups. When deciding what is news, the watchdog team looks for a “bad guy,” a clearly identifiable antagonist that presents the opportunity for them to propose a solution to a problem. Misuse of taxpayers’ money, malpractice or abuse of power and existing laws and regulations, and inadequate laws and regulations are among the criteria the journalists take into consideration while evaluating whether a case is worth investigating. Their proposed solutions reside either within existing regulations and laws or existing practices and regulations in different cities or states. If a case does not fit most or all of these criteria, it most likely would be seen as not worth investigating. In the end, not only have they left themselves no choice but to stay within existing power relations, thus preventing journalists from questioning the system itself, but in a lot of cases they also steer them away from holding businesses accountable because it falls outside of its definitional boundaries. When investigating the private sector, if journalists identify some kind of wrongdoing, they report what is going on then try to figure out why it is happening. The answer to this question is usually that regulations are too lax or the public institutions and agencies that were supposed to regulate failed to do so. Regulator, not businesses are held to higher standards. Businesses need only be legal. Finding a villain is easier in public sector whereas it is harder to investigate businesses. Issues about public institutions,

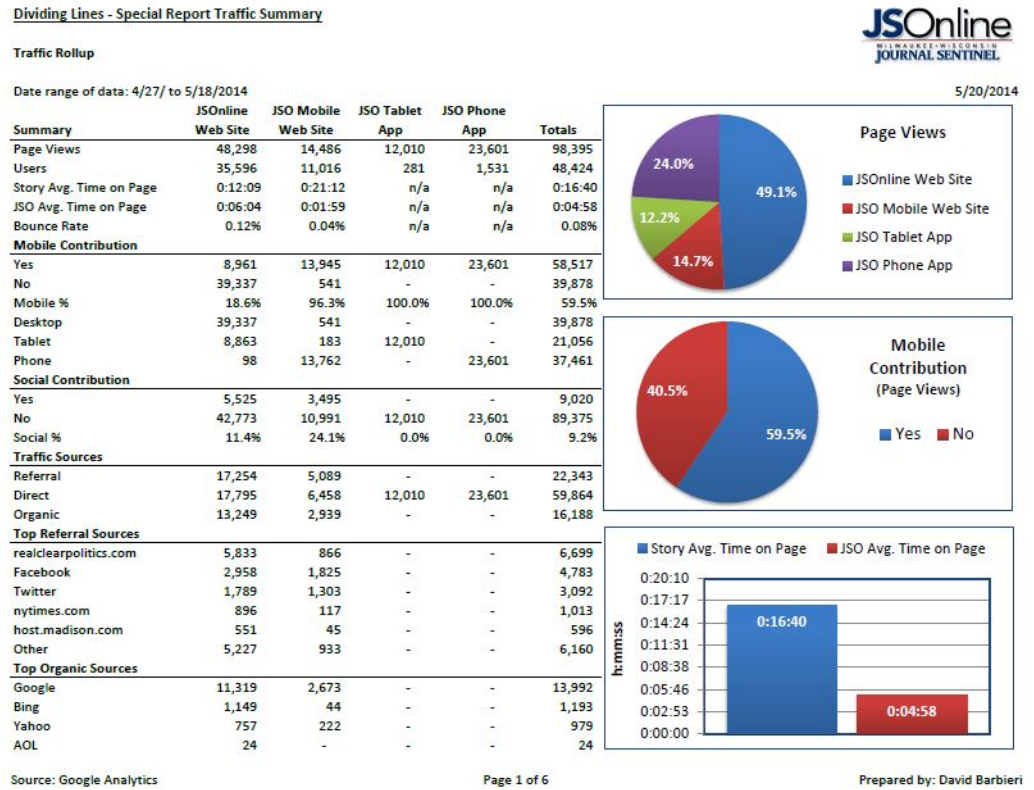
where serving the public is the underlying principle, can easily be associated with betrayal while the goal of making greater profits in the private sector might not prompt the feeling of being betrayed. The award-winning investigative series, “Chemical Fallout,” is a good example of how the paper reported a business story on the usage of dangerous chemicals in everyday goods as a governmental, regulatory problem. These criteria and patterns in their reporting reveal a neoliberal set of values and an impulse to focus on and hold accountable the public institutions and existing regulations but not the businesses that take advantage of those regulations. These decisions are embedded in the journalists’ moral judgments in deciding what should become news and where the paper draws the line in the way they advocate for a solution or for change. The requirement of a villain-victim dynamic in order to investigate a story not only limits the paper’s watchdog role but also risks seeking a villain in every situation. The newspaper measures the success of its reporting by the impact and change it prompts, and as such, watchdog stories encourage readers to take action through follow-up stories and events. The stories also provide existing solutions and often include the contact information of people responsible for wrongdoing or contact information of readers’ representatives. Although it’s not sufficient and is mostly limited to holding the public sector accountable (in those stories where the paper can find an identifiable antagonist that enables them to propose a solution within the limits of the existing system), the paper’s watchdog journalism in a way differs from the tradition of watchdog role in the public’s name as it not only calls attention to certain social problems but also encourages the community to take action for particular reforms.



News plays an important role in our understanding and knowledge of the social world, but market-driven news operations paired with the constraints of detached observation limit journalism's potential as a democratizing force. Investigative journalism, to a degree, can provide better tools to roll back the processes of professionalization, standardization of content and marginalization of the interest of working classes. Types of investigative reporting that favor active adversarialism against the power elites and advocating for the powerless not only can narrate injustice and injury in social life but also can play a role in activating the public sphere by confronting certain social realities, calling attention to them, and stimulating civic action against the breakdowns of social systems. The means and conditions of production and the circulation of news; journalistic routines, rituals and managerial bureaucracy; and journalists' understanding of their work and journalistic responsibility all impact what becomes news, what doesn't and to what end. Hence, without altering the news-for-profit characteristics of, and the private capitalist control over the news media, watchdog reporting cannot transcend its contemporary limitations and paradoxes. Under the weight of the profit- and advertisement-driven media environment and concentrated ownership, even investigative journalists claim to refrain from making moral judgments. As a result, they tend to invoke dominant values, rely on existing laws and practices and official sources, and embrace detached objectivity in their reporting as they are afraid of criticism and losing their jobs or their professional authority. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* transition into a publication that puts more of an emphasis on watchdog projects sheds light on the conditions and problems of today's journalism and also on the possibilities for tomorrow's journalism.

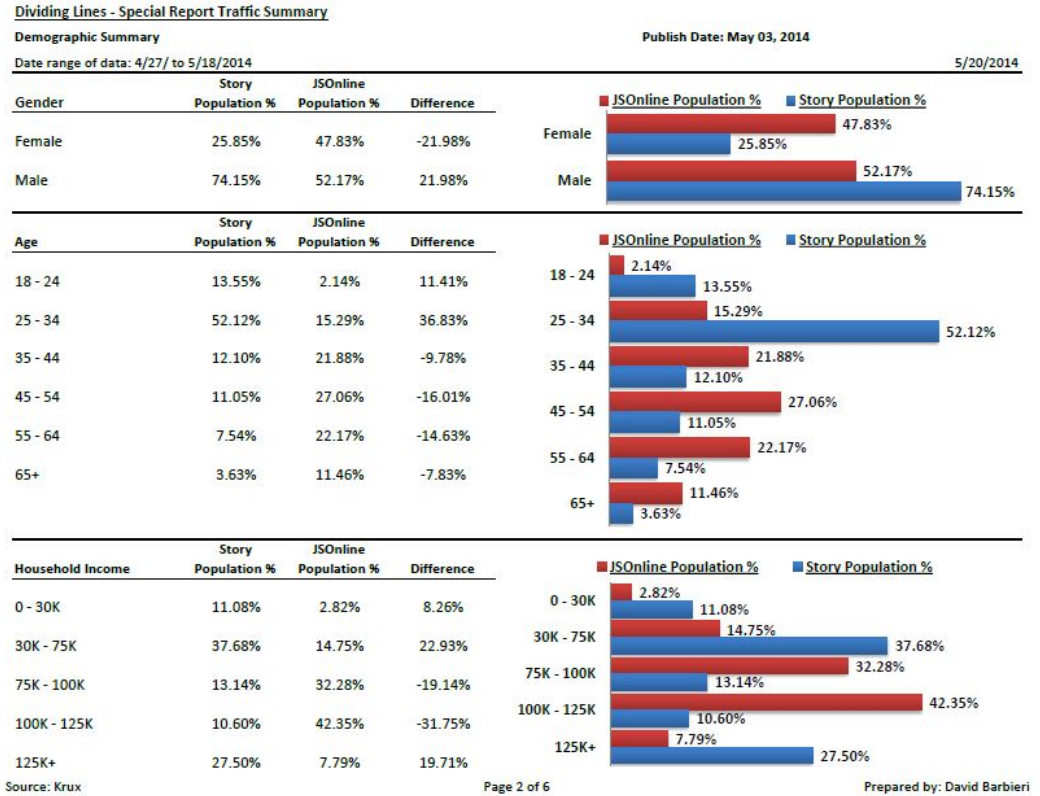
If more news organizations invested in investigative reporting, as a result, more experiences could also produce ways to overcome the current problems and shortcomings of watchdog reporting. The experience of news reading and the conditions of news production and circulation have changed, and journalism has suffered under the weight of profit- and advertisement-driven media operations, professionalization and concentrated ownership. But these processes have not altered the public's hunger for news. Instead of invoking a sense of nostalgia about journalism's earlier forms and practices, scholarship and journalists should focus on new ways, based on whatever is at hand, to transition the local and the global experience of media into a more democratic one.

Figure 1: “Dividing Lines” Series Web Traffic Metrics Summary



Source: Google Analytics. (Provided to the author by the *Journal Sentinel* staff.)

**Figure 2: “Dividing Lines” Series Web Traffic Metrics Demographics Summary**



Source: Google Analytics. (Provided to the author by the *Journal Sentinel* staff.)

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