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## Comparative and critical analysis: The roles of civic and traditional journalism

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COMPARATIVE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS: THE ROLES OF CIVIC AND  
TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM

by

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Bachelor of Arts,  
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## Abstract

This research contains a comparative and critical analysis of both civic and traditional journalism and the practices associated with the two models. In depth interviews were conducted with a total of nine respondents to explore their perspectives on the topic. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the sample consisted solely of journalists and former journalists. From the data emerged five primary themes: Objectivity, Journalists as Problem Solvers, Confusion with the Term Civic Journalism, Journalists' Encouragement of Political Discourse and Deliberation, and Dedication to Traditional Journalism. Respondents overwhelmingly supported the notion of traditional journalism as the dominant model. There was support for some practices utilized by the civic journalism model, however, the values endemic to traditional journalism such as remaining objective and detached, appeared to be a professional priority for the majority of the sample. Journalists' role of encouraging political discourse and deliberation was supported by over two-thirds of the sample. Over half of respondents demonstrated cautiousness with the concept of journalists' fulfilling a problem-solving role. The majority of respondents reported utilizing traditional journalistic practices including conventional source selection, and a "just the facts" style of reporting.

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## Comparative and Critical Analysis: The Roles of Civic and Traditional Journalism

Civic journalism emphasizes more solution-based content and encourages public deliberation. Perhaps this could be done without sacrificing the valued tenets of the traditional journalism model. There are positive elements of traditional as well as civic journalism. However, for the purpose of this exploratory study, a comparative and critical analysis of the roles and practices of traditional journalism and civic journalism will be performed. Both models need to be examined and scrutinized in order to see which one best serves the people. Perhaps a combination of techniques taken from both models will support the most advantageous approach to journalism.

Conducting field research, including in-depth interviews with journalists, will provide data that are detailed and relevant. A comparative analysis of civic and traditional journalism will illustrate the differences and similarities of the two models. Comparative analysis can highlight two similar things that have crucial differences, however, they can end up having surprising commonalities (Walk, 1998). According to Walk (1998), comparative analysis can be conducted using a “lens” or “keyhole” type of comparison which allows for one of the things being compared to be more heavily weighted than the other. The analysis of civic journalism for the purpose of this study will be more expansive than its traditional counterpart. “Lens comparisons are useful for illuminating, critiquing, or challenging the stability of a thing that, before the analysis, seemed perfectly understood,” (p.1). A critical analysis of the two models will aid in a better understanding of the principles that guide each respective model. The critical analysis is subjective because at times, it will express the opinions of the researcher during the evaluation process (Lejune, 2001). These thorough analyses are relevant to this study because they assist in gaining a comprehensive

understanding of the techniques and roles associated with both types of journalism.

The terms “public” and “civic” journalism will be used interchangeably throughout the paper. In the literature these terms are similarly defined and are often used together. Rosen (1999) explains how the titles for the model are used interchangeably: “By 1993, this idea would have a name, public journalism, or equally often, civic journalism, terms that also described a small movement of people trying to discover what these terms meant,” ( p. 21). Rosen argues that public journalism goes by a number of different names: “I called it public journalism; some preferred civic journalism; or sometimes community journalism,” (p. 4).

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the thoughts and feelings of journalists to see how they experience journalism, whether it is public or traditional, and what they consider their roles and practices. Given that public journalism has been labeled controversial by some traditional journalists because it has been perceived by them as activism or advocacy journalism, it is important to examine this topic to see if journalists think this is the case. It will be interesting to discover whether or not the respondents believe journalists should solve problems and offer solutions as a part of their job. The study is also important because it sheds light on parts of journalism that need improvement and it will help determine if current practices are effective and if not, offer suggestions for improvement. Is it possible to remain objective as a journalist and still assist in solving problems of the community? Is the traditional way of practicing journalism sufficient or is there a need for more? Examining the perspectives of media professionals will help answer these questions.

The media landscape has gone through immense changes with new technology and will continue to evolve. Engaging the public can be a challenge for journalists. Encouraging



public deliberation is nearly impossible if one is dealing with an apathetic or absent public. (This is where the assumption that select public journalism techniques can bridge the gap between the public's apathy and engagement.) If the community feels stories are about *them* and *their* problems, then it may be possible to actually make a difference. Perhaps more stories geared towards actual citizens will increase readership in a business like newspapers where there has been a rapid decline.

Rosen (1999) explains that during the development stages of public journalism, some journalists were noticing that they did not have a public to inform. "Fewer readers for their best work, a rising disgust with politics and journalism, and a growing feeling that the craft of journalism was misfiring as it attempted to engage readers in the news of the day" (p. 20). These are some of the problems Rosen felt prompted public journalism to being. Rosen admits that in 1989, when he began his inquiry into what was "wrong" with journalism, he only had a small following of the mainstream press who were questioning their place as journalists as well as their profession. "Democracy and its discontents was a major theme in the inquiry, and many who joined in were discontented themselves: with their work, their sinking standing among citizens, the place they had carved out for themselves as professionals. Amid a mood of anxiety, they set out to understand democracy in a different way, so they could see journalism from another angle: as democracy's cultivator, as well as its chronicler" (p. 4).

This is not an argument or push for traditional journalistic practices to be abandoned. It is simply a suggestion to explore the idea of incorporating techniques and practices that are identified with civic journalism to see if there is a better end product and positive results that arise from that product. It is predicted that the fusion of components from both models will

produce the most positive outcomes and enhance connections among journalists and citizens. This research suggests ways this “fusion” can occur. The study is necessary not only for future research, but for use by journalism educators as well. Discovering what types of reporting and writing can best reach audiences without compromising journalistic integrity can be of use to journalism professors and students. Canvassing new ideas and combining them with traditional concepts may lead to a novel theoretical model of journalism that could be experimented with in the future.

First it is necessary to define journalism as a whole and then outline the various definitions attached to traditional and civic journalism. Next, the indicators, characteristics and principles of the journalistic model will be discussed to dissect the multifarious components that influence and constitute the practice of civic journalism. The tenets of traditional and civic journalism will be acknowledged and discussed to help identify similarities and differences between the two different models. A critique of civic as well as communitarian journalism will be reported. Finally, select civic journalism projects and teaching methods will be reviewed to appraise their efficacy and promise in terms of using the techniques in the future. This review of literature covers many facets of public journalism, positive and negative. It also clarifies the roles of traditional journalistic practices in journalism today. The literature is rich with varying examples of public journalism and what it means to different people. These variances add to the intrigue of this model of journalism that is often not considered a “model” at all. It has been called regular journalism with a label attached to it, advocacy journalism, activism, and pandering. There are many people who staunchly disapprove of the idea of civic journalism. On the other hand, there are

those who think it is the only way to practice journalism. These conflicting positions are noted throughout the literature review to provide readers perspectives from both associations. There is not an argument for one model or the other. What is presented is information outlining the pluses and minuses associated with each type of journalism and the possibility of a combination of the two is considered.

### **What Is Journalism?**

Journalism can mean different things to different people. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss the concepts associated with civic journalism as well as traditional journalism. Every profession espouses different views in terms of what their roles and priorities are (Janowitz, 1978). Fancher (2009) cites William's 'The Journalists Creed,' "I believe in the profession of journalism. I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service is a betrayal of this trust," (Fancher, 2009, p. 36). At the heart of this creed are the main conventions of accuracy, truth, fairness, independence, and public service (Fancher, 2009). A journalist has a responsibility to give voice to those who have not been heard (Rodriguez, 2008). "We need to frame our stories with our audiences in mind, not journalism contests," (Rodriguez, 2008, p.65). A primary part of the journalism profession is public service (Rodriguez, 2008).

"The core mission of journalism is to provide citizens with useful information about public affairs," (Delli Carpini, 2004, p. 61). Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) assert that journalism involves being a good neighbor, a watchdog, being accurate and unbiased, and reporting quickly. There are a plethora of examples and definitions used to define the role of journalism. While most definitions appear to possess similarities, there are different

models of journalism that value different principles and ways of executing the craft. Further examination of these variances will be outlined for a current appraisal.

The two models possess different philosophies and as a result, the competing perspectives can encounter problems. Specifically, civic journalism takes an approach that abandons the detachment role of traditional journalism to immerse itself in the public sphere and in a sense, become part of the community and its problems.

“Widely associated with the theoretical work of New York University Professor Jay Rosen and the writings of former *Wichita Eagle* Editor Davis Merritt, the emergence of public journalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s may perhaps best be explained as a reaction to perceived flaws in the practice of conventional journalism”, (Haas, 2000, p. 27). Traditional journalism stands by its dominant role of getting the information to the public without departing from objectivity. One primary perspective of civic journalism is to take a role that promotes the participation of the public in the deliberative and political arenas. Civic journalism also seeks to produce solution-based content while traditional journalism is mainly providing content to inform, not to suggest ways in which to fix the public’s problems.

### **Traditional Journalism**

Traditional journalistic practices focus on maintaining objectivity, checking up on governmental officials, and neutrally providing information to audiences. These characteristics have defined the dominant way of writing and reporting the news for several decades. Accuracy and unbiased reporting are two of the fundamental characteristics of the model (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005). Heider et al., also cite watchdog role and

rapid reporting to be other main roles of traditional journalism. In their survey of 600 adults, Heider et al., discovered that in terms of public opinion toward local news, more than 60% of adults 55 and older found that the traditional role of media watchdog to be extremely important.

The public's right to know, freedom of the press and objectivity are the traditional canons of American journalism (Rosen, Glasser, Davis, & Campbell, 2000). Traditional journalism does not usually accept a role that upholds a duty to morally improve society (Rosen et al., 2000). This role is generally reserved for those who participate in activism, political or not, and to everyday citizens (Rosen et al., 2000). "Traditional journalism emphasizes the values of fairness, balance, and detachment which in turn establishes newspapers' credibility among the readers and by extension creates a market among advertisers who want their products and services featured in a credible medium,"(Arant & Meyer, 1998, p. 205).

In the model of traditional journalism, journalists filter what is going on in their community and present it to their readers (Nip, 2006). Citizens of the community do not play a role in the news process with the exception of being used as sources for a story (p.216). This is different from public journalism where the journalists seek to include citizens in the news-making process (p.216). There are several definitions included in the literature pertaining to public journalism. There does not appear to be a concrete, all-encompassing definition of public journalism. The conceptualization of public journalism for the purpose of this study will include a variety of interpretive meanings from several authors to contextualize the term.

## **Public/Civic Journalism Model**

Massey and Haas, (2002), define public journalism as a reform movement that seeks to invigorate civic life in the United States. They note that in order to achieve this, journalists need to be persuaded to adopt public journalistic practices in order to make up for the detriment that has supposedly been caused to the public's civic sphere of their communities as well as on a national level, by the employment of traditional journalistic practices (Massey & Haas, 2002). The other main objective needed for the success of public journalism is the ability to reach out and affect news audiences, convincing everyday citizens to become actively engaged in civic life (Massey & Haas, 2002).

## **Definition and Conceptualization of Public Journalism**

Nip (2008) identified six primary practices that aid in creating a well-rounded definition of public journalism. "Listening to the public to help shape the news agenda, giving ordinary people a voice, covering stories in a way that facilitates public understanding and stimulates citizen deliberation of the problems behind the stories, presenting news to make it more accessible and easier for people to engage in the issues, engaging the community in problem solving, and maximizing the impact of the coverage in the community," (p. 180). The author contends that there is not a consensus in terms of what comprises civic journalism. She asserts that critics and supporters have not come to an agreement when defining the practice (p.179).

According to St. John (2007), the objective of civic journalism is to integrate the input of citizens into news stories and to use the influence of the news organization to promote public deliberation pertaining to community affairs. According to Perry (2003), the primary objective of civic journalism is to place journalists and their audiences in the middle

of the political and social processes so they can be active participants, not just detached bystanders. Corrigan (1999) argues that proponents of the model say public journalism requires, “Authentic change in the thinking and feeling of traditional journalists. Public journalism advocates are in the business of providing enlightenment and making converts” (Corrigan, 1999, p. 1).

With so many different meanings in terms of the definition of public journalism, some dissimilar, some appearing unified, it is important to investigate whether or not public journalism is in fact a bona fide way of practicing journalism. The lack of homogeneity within the terminology raises questions about its identity in the journalism community. Since traditional journalism, compared to its public counterpart, appears to have a more straightforward definition and structure, there will be a more expansive explanation of the various facets of public journalism for the purpose of this study.

According to Voakes, (1999), the fact that there is not a clearly defined meaning for public journalism causes problems in terms of its value. If a precise definition cannot be assigned to public journalism, it is possible for critics to censure the practice even further based on that premise. Voakes cites Foughy and Schaffer’s definition of civic journalism as “a set of journalistic initiatives which make a deliberate attempt to reach out to citizens, listen to them, and to have citizens listen and talk to each other,” (Voakes, 1999, p. 757). The term “public journalism” came about circa 1993 in connection with a forming movement that was focused on repairing the deterioration between journalists and American public life (Nip, 2006, p.213). “What supporters and critics agree is that the term “public journalism” means different things to different people,” (Nip, 2006, p.213).

Voakes (1999) asserts that many editors try to employ the principles of public

journalism without fully understanding what the practice is about. He adds that public journalism consists of a committed relationship between journalists and citizens of a community (Voakes, 1999). If this relationship between the reporter and the community is not taken seriously and in a committed fashion, it is most likely going to be unsuccessful (Voakes, 1999). Some of the ways a reporter can show this level of commitment is to cover stories that help increase public understanding and encourage deliberation among community members about the problems behind the stories (Nip, 2008, p. 180).

Dissecting and defining civic journalism can become rather complex because of its many dimensions. “Civic journalism involves journalistic initiative rather than reactive coverage; it involves an interest in moving toward solutions to community problems that takes journalism far beyond the detached reporting of problems; it involves ongoing, long-term commitment to the betterment of the public life; and it involves not only the reporting of important public issues, but also published efforts to probe citizen’s concerns and engage them in the public life,” (Voakes, 1999, p. 759). With the involvement of a considerable number of components, public journalism for Voakes does not appear to have a straightforward, simple interpretation. Instead, the author includes several dimensions of the practice that aid in making the term whole.

### **Indicators of Public/Civic Journalism**

Voakes (1999) outlines four indicators of public journalism that he considers recurrent themes when studying the practice: Enterprise, information for decision making, facilitation of discourse, and attention to citizens’ concerns. The first indicator he mentions is enterprise. Voakes maintains the assumption that enterprise uncovers issues that concern



community members and supports citizens in becoming engaged in the solutions to the problems that are endemic in their sphere, (p.759). He argues this enterprise in civic journalism does not differ much from the enterprise reporting that is performed under the traditional model of journalism (p.759). According to Voakes, the ways in which it is different pertains to the longevity and commitment to the public, not just the immediate story. The public journalism type of enterprise intends to forge a commitment to seeking solutions to the community's issues that goes far beyond the limits of simply publishing a story (p.759). It also contemplates how it will help the community, instead of just how good a story will be (p.759). While the primary function of enterprise is similar under both models of journalism, it is important to note the key differences between the two. The second indicator that Voakes regards is information for decision making. "A principal role for the civic journalist is to enable citizens not only to communicate in a public arena, but be able to work toward solutions without necessarily being led by institutional policymakers," (p. 759). He argues that a presentation of alternative viewpoints needs to be offered to community members so that they are able to form their own public judgment. This also includes journalists' attention to the responses put forth by officials to those alternatives that were presented to the public (p.759). The third indicator is facilitation of discourse. Voakes asserts that this dimension of public journalism is key in terms of providing the opportunity for citizens to engage in public deliberation (p.760). It relies on the premise that people long to be involved in the public sphere, not experience it as an outsider. He suggests that civic journalists take the necessary steps to help facilitate public deliberation even if this means exercising nontraditional measures in order to get community members together and talking (p.760). The last indicator of civic journalism recognized by Voakes is attention to citizens'

concerns. This dimension is salient because oftentimes, average citizens do not have strong voices in the public sphere and news media. Their thoughts and opinions are often overshadowed by officials and quasi-officials in the majority of news content. Attention to citizens' concerns suggests the rejection of the traditional news agenda that is usually created by people that have immense political and economic authority and is used in lieu of the public's agenda (p.760). This also involves giving just as much credibility to the average citizen as is afforded to those in positions of power (p.760). Citizens' concerns could have a difficult time being acknowledged if they are absent from the content that is disseminated. The interests of average community members may also be overlooked if there is an obvious inequity in terms of attention paid to characters of power versus consideration and airtime given to the typical citizen. These indicators shed light on the complicated dimensions of civic journalism and perhaps how their characteristics could be weaved into the fabric of traditional journalistic practices in order to reduce exclusivity and increase public deliberation.

Various facets of public journalism are outlined below to assist in the analysis of the model's elements.

### **Principles of Public/Civic Journalism**

Young (2004) outlines key principles of public journalism in her study examining daily public journalism. The author states that public journalism should have a democratizing effect, encourage common ground, suggest solutions, and develop systematic communication. The democratizing effect should be the result of valuing the input of average citizens and making their suggestions and voices central to what is being reported (Young,

2004). The civic journalist focuses primarily on the citizen's agenda (Massey, 1998, p. 395).

According to Young, public journalism can encourage common ground by implementing core values as a part of journalistic practice. Presenting matters in a way that the public as a whole can comprehend and identify with helps citizens understand how they might be affected by events, instead of just reporting the news as usual (Young, 2004). The author asserts that suggesting alternative solutions offers community members the chance to fix a problem. It is also beneficial to feature success stories that highlight solution-based outcomes as opposed to focusing on the controversy of issues (Young, 2004). The final public journalism principle mentioned by Young suggests that systematic communication take place on the part of the press. The methods offered to facilitate this communication are polling the public in order to determine what is on their mind, focus groups to establish what types of problems the public wishes to address, and open forums, including town hall meetings, to allow for a variety of voices to be heard and to provide an opportunity for the public to work together on the issues that affect their communities (Young, 2004). Young's principles of public journalism indicate support for an active, participatory role on the part of media. Public journalism argues that journalists are well suited to deliberate issues and participate in solving the problems with the public (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, Cho, & Shah, 2006).

### **Sourcing Practices and Civic Journalism**

Traditional journalism has long relied on the use of information from male and non-minority sources. Given that times have changed in terms of women and minorities gaining status, sourcing habits should follow suit and be updated to reflect all voices, instead of a select few.

In order for civic journalism to thrive in a community, all people should be given the chance to have their voices heard. Traditional sourcing patterns often exclude members of the community who may have important information to add to a news story. It is not uncommon for minorities to only be featured in news coverage when there are crime stories being reported (Kurpius, 2002). Research has shown that reporters often select sources that are male, Caucasian officials who are regarded by journalists as credible sources of information, (Kurpius, 2002). Mainstream journalists need to listen to and give voices to the homeless, the poor, the Native Americans, the gay and the Black (Altschull, 1996, p.170). “Civic journalism, through its emphasis on community and citizens, essentially is a news work prescription for non-elite sourcing,” (Massey, 2002, p.395).

According to Kurpius, (2002), civic journalism utilizes non-traditional sources and this practice contributes to increased diversity when sourcing. How can journalists move towards a more inclusive model of sourcing? Kurpius suggests more enterprise reporting as an answer to the lack of diversity in news stories. “This deeper and more contextual understanding of the community is assumed to show through reporting as journalists identify alternative frames or angles for stories and focus more on developing enterprise reporting” (Kurpius, 2002, p. 856). The author asserts that civic journalists need to think outside the box in terms of choosing a diverse selection of sources. They can do this by seeking out individuals who serve as specialists in their communities (Kurpius, 2002). “Although more ‘average citizens’ may appear and be quoted more often in the news, their narrative role may remain one of merely illustrating community problems; in effect, they remain the backdrop against which the ‘usual suspect’ sources of experts and officials offer, in top-down fashion, substantive explanations of problem causes and solutions,” (Massey & Haas, 2002, p.568).

Kurpius (2002) conducted a content analysis of nearly 185 tapes from news television stations that practiced civic journalism. The tapes were submissions to the Pew Center for Civic Journalism for their James K. Batten awards contest. The research intent was to test whether television reporters who practice civic journalism use more diverse sources, in terms of gender and race, compared to the proportions in the 2000 United States Census. Kurpius' four hypotheses were stated as follows: H1: Civic journalism will use minority sources in proportions equal to the U.S. Census; H2: As part of an expected increase in minority sources in civic journalism stories, minority reporters will use a greater percentage of minority sources than non-minority reporters do; H3: Civic journalism will use female sources in proportions equal to the U.S. Census; H4: As part of an expected increase in female sources in civic journalism stories, female reporters will use a greater percentage of female sources than male reporters, (p. 857). Support was found for all hypotheses with the exception of H3. In the civic journalism stories that were included in the study, the representation of women used as sources only reached the 40% mark, 10 percent shy of the 50.9% U.S. Census level (p.857).

The results indicated that underrepresented groups are covered more than the traditional sources and are permitted to communicate their ideas through the civic journalism paradigm, (Kurpius, 2002). "Based on these results, it is possible to say that civic journalism produces a positive effect on the diversity of sources presented on television news," (p. 859). The author notes the use of civic journalism as an indicator of positive change to the customary standard of source selection. He maintains that the improvement in source representation should not come as a surprise because the practice of civic journalism depends a great deal upon enterprise reporting and as he mentioned earlier, this model of reporting has the most

potential for increased diversity in terms of source selection:

“Civic journalism dictates that reporters spend time in communities gaining a greater depth and context of understanding. If it is true that reporters tend to use people they know and trust as primary sources, and if civic journalism creates a routine of getting to know and trust people in diverse communities, then it makes sense that civic journalism practices would improve the diversity of sources in race, gender, and affiliation,” (Kurpius, 2002, p. 861). Although three of the four research hypotheses were supported, Kurpius (2002) cautioned that there is still room for improvement when it comes to accurate representation of underrepresented groups. He reports that women and Latinos are still underrepresented, even within the confines of civic journalism, (Kurpius, 2002). Because there are different degrees to which television news stations incorporate civic journalism, it is hard to tell at what point in time the techniques of civic journalism start to make a difference and improve source diversity (Kurpius, 2002). “Reporters should recognize groups that are most likely to be marginalized in the context of a news story and should adjust accordingly to include disenfranchised perspectives,” (Mcdevitt, 2000, p.46).

Perhaps innovative source selection tools designed to increase inclusion and diversity can be taught at the university level so journalists are prepared to provide accurate representations of people in the news content that they produce for dissemination. It appears from Kurpius’ study that civic journalism employs sourcing techniques that are more sensitive and aware of differences to certain underrepresented groups than its traditional counterpart.

### **Effects of Civic Journalism**

Does public journalism really make a difference in terms of encouraging civic

engagement and political participation? According to Nichols, et al., (2006) the journalistic techniques used to further the goals of public journalism are what matter. The authors conducted a study to examine the effects public journalism has had since its emergence in the early 1990's. The study analyzed 651 public journalism projects derived from the repository of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism.

Framing news stories in an investigative or solution-based manner tends to instigate citizen engagement and community action, (Nichols, et al., 2006). On the other hand, the authors noted that framing from a human interest or historical angle appeared to incite the opposite effect by diminishing the collaboration and participation among community members.

“Problem-solving frames have the most profound effects on efforts to improve citizenship and the political process, and investigative news frames were also positively correlated with improvements in the political process,” (p. 89). The research also cited that the journalists who take the time to comprehend the frame of reference of the average citizen will be more apt to create journalism projects that have positive effects and enhance the skills of community members in terms of civic duty and deliberation, (p.90).

When examining the effects public journalism has on political process, Massey and Haas (2002) performed a meta-analysis of 47 studies and found that public journalism has made a difference in terms of election reporting. The authors suggested that these findings are to be construed with caution because of their lack of established validity. “Although it is probable that public journalism election projects have had some contributing effect on voter turnout, the complexity of voting behaviors makes it highly unlikely that that they are solely or even mostly responsible for the observed increases in voter turnout,” (Massey & Haas, 2002, p. 576). The authors are concerned with the methodological shortcomings of some of the

studies they evaluated in their meta-analysis. They indicate that the findings in the literature are interpreted in a way that may not be an accurate representation of the performance of public journalism, (Massey & Haas, 2002). These methodological deficiencies are not uncommon within the realm of public journalism research, according to Massey and Haas. The literature on public journalism is uneven and focuses a lot on case-based research and therefore it is difficult to make empirical suggestions about the effects of the model (Nichols, et al., 2006). Massey and Haas propose that future research be conducted and include actual laboratory experiments, in lieu of research conducted in natural settings, to assess the effects of public journalism on audiences and civic involvement. Utilizing controlled experimental methods will aid in identifying causal factors that may be present when studying the influence that public journalism has on audience members, (Massey & Haas, 2002). Massey and Haas (2002) conclude that the movement of public journalism falls short of its ultimate goal to direct the behaviors and civic habits of community members. Perhaps these authors are not entirely dismissing the model of public journalism altogether, but instead they are calling for further research to determine what roles the model plays in the civic sphere.

### **Critique of Civic Journalism**

While the literature points out several positive aspects of civic journalism, it is important to take a look at the other side of the argument. Opponents of the practice argue that civic journalists violate the norms and practices that are routine in traditional journalism (Haas & Steiner, 2002). “Public journalism challenges the paradigm of objectivity and several corollary tenets of mainstream journalism,” (Haas & Steiner, 2002, p. 325). Critics contend that civic journalism is a marketing practice that weakens the independence of and



objective position of the journalist (Moscowitz, 2002, p.64). The philosophy of civic journalism to routinely include average citizens in stories is the opposite of traditional journalistic practice which is to remain in the watchdog position to maintain accountability for elected officials (Haas & Steiner, 2002). These oppositional practices can create a strain in terms of defining what the roles and objectives of journalism should be.

These feelings of opposition actually took the jobs of some reporters at the *Wichita Eagle*. When the paper changed their model from traditional to civic journalism, there were journalists who disagreed with the changes and they lost their jobs as a result (Haas & Steiner, 2002). The former editor of the *Wichita Eagle*, Davis Merritt offered the following words when discussing the discomfort of his former employees, “When you adopt new guiding principles and people are uncomfortable with it, they should leave,” (p. 331). The *Wichita Eagle* was not the only paper who experienced an all-or-nothing paradigm change. The *St. Louis Dispatch* former editor Cole Campbell was quoted admitting that many employees resigned or were fired because of how he ran the paper: “When you are changing an organization, you need turnover. It’s an opportunity to leverage talent, to change the mix,” (p. 331).

According to Haas and Steiner (2002), many writers asserted that some news organizations that were employing the civic model of journalism would avoid controversial stories and instead emphasized non-controversial content. Examples were given to illustrate this quandary. The *Miami Herald* refused to publish a story that involved a photo essay that was compiled by one of their photographers because the photos displayed teenage girls and boys and their involvement with gang activities (p.332). Apparently, the editors of the paper rejected publishing the six-month long photo project because, “The paper was now leaning

toward stories that offer solutions to community problems, not ones that simply display and encourage an ‘aberrant section of society,’ ( p. 332). This example illustrates the lengths that editors can go to out of fear of publishing something negative, even if it is true and may very well serve the public interest by being published. They are reporting only parts of a whole story and avoid including negative aspects of the narrative to portray the picture they deem appropriate.

Another example is related to a newspaper article that was published in a way that did not reflect reality. The newspaper, whose name went unmentioned, was covering a story while experimenting with public journalism. The story entailed a Korean church that was shut down because they did not have a legitimate certificate of occupancy (Haas & Steiner, 2002). The newspaper, while trying to exercise civic journalistic practices, held a meeting with the church members. During this meeting, there was a lot of arguing and chaos among the church members, but after the reporter wrote his account of the story, it was completely reconstructed by his editors to paint a picture that the meeting was a place to “find common ground for a new foundation of understanding,” (Haas & Steiner, 2002, p. 332). The Korean Church town hall meeting article was reworked to portray a “public journalism success story and celebration of diversity,” (Corrigan, 2003, p. 23). The story was reconfigured to fulfill the agenda of these editors and their news organizations’ goal to commit to civic journalism; however, this incident also left out factual information that should have been included in the original version of the story. “With a few twists of semantic details, public journalism can become public posturing,” (Haas & Steiner, 2002, p. 332).

Many newspaper editors argue that civic journalism creates activists instead of reporters and this leads to the serving of certain interests such as funding for community

groups, academics, and corporate news owners, (St. John, 2007). An aspect of public journalism that has received a great deal of criticism is the cash for reporting projects, (Corrigan, 2003, p.22). “If a story is worthy of assignment or publication, why would a newspaper wait for financing by Pew or others to initiate it?” (Corrigan, 2003, p. 22).

Furthering the public interest has historically caused apprehension and reluctance among the journalism community because it goes against the traditional professional values that honor objectivity and detachment, (St. John, 2007). St. John also suggests that this commitment to remaining objective and distanced can create a press that is distanced from their communities in terms of establishing and reporting the news. Many journalists, however, felt that “The proposed abandonment of objectivity and remoteness for a facilitative role was an attempt to maneuver the public’s attention and action in a way that could benefit privileged interests,” (St. John, 2007, p. 257). St. John cited the feelings of many reporters that civic journalism was merely a cheerleading job for journalists to become community problem solvers. This concept did not sit well with many working journalists who were trained to objectively determine and report the news. Attempting to have journalists restructure their entire way of doing things can cause confusion, inefficiency, and bad feelings, (Davis, 2000). Incorporating public journalism projects that were supposed to make audiences feel good, leads to bad feelings amongst journalists in the newsroom, (Davis, 2000). The fact that many civic journalism projects have been made possible by grant money has also caused criticism because of the concerns about grantors wanting to have a say in the final product that they funded, (St. John, 2007).

### **Other Forms of Journalism**

These forms of journalism have similar properties of public journalism and have, at times, been confused with public journalism. The following literature is included to distinguish these as separate from public journalism, but also to outline the similarities that are present among them.

### **The Case Against Communitarian Journalism**

While there are many facets of civic journalism that have been positively outlined for the purpose of this research, there are also negative aspects related to another model of journalism that need to be addressed. Communitarian journalism appears to resemble an extreme form of public journalism. Critics of public journalism often focus exclusively on the communitarian aspect of the model (Perry, 2003). Since public journalism has a community aspect to it, an explanation of communitarian journalism is relevant.

Communitarian journalism restricts all values of individualism and seeks to promote full community loyalty and conformity, (Barney, 1996). It is essential to briefly discuss this particular model of journalism, because it is so closely related to civic journalism and should not be confused with the latter. A completely community-based press could set the system up for a myriad of consequences. If the tenets of traditional journalism are abandoned as a result of a complete shift to employ solely community-based journalistic practices, then the sacred role of traditional journalism in the United States will be threatened and at risk for extinction. A delicate balance needs to be achieved to avoid pandering and ensure credible content.

According to Barney, (1996) community or communitarian journalism can create what he refers to as “media desperation,” where newsmakers are willing to do whatever it takes to get community members to read or listen to their content. This creates a type of

unconditional membership among professional communities and that unconditional membership can have consequences (p.141). This community-focused crusade is what causes media to simply provide audiences with what they think they want and this can turn into pandering audiences and creating insignificant content instead of encouraging deliberation and participation, (p.143). Barney argues that this type of communitarianism is much more socially dangerous than individualism. “Communitarianism at its most effective is intolerant of individualism and controlling information. Individualism, on the other hand, must tolerate both communitarian and pluralistic information,” (p. 144). The author asserts that the biggest problems arise when editors and journalists become so enthralled with their professional circles that they lose the individual abilities to make decisions and survive outside the collective community, (p. 144). “Such is the nature of a community with shared values and goals; a community in which the individualist with differing views is dangerous just for not reinforcing the values of the community,” (p.144).

Journalists pressured to adhere to a communitarian model of journalism face compromising their journalistic integrity in order to please their community. Journalists who are willing to sacrifice their autonomy and give in to the community’s demands are ultimately forfeiting their capacity to ensure pluralism for their community, (Barney, 1996). “Media units yielding autonomy become part of the tyranny of the majority, or at least of the community power structure,” (p. 145). Within communitarian journalism, conformity, loyalty, and reinforcement of the status quo are valued over the virtues of truth and moral autonomy, (p.145). Barney posits that while individualism is superior to communitarianism, that does not mean that it is acceptable to disregard the necessity of moral sensitivity. This holds true for not only for individuals, but working journalists as well. Because an individual

is to a great extent a free agent, possessing the ability to exercise moral sensitivity is critical. If traditional journalism is striving to remain superior to community-based forms of journalism, it would serve the model best to assure its capacity to apply appropriate moral consideration while promoting and preserving the values of individualism.

### **Citizen Journalism**

Niekamp (2009) defines citizen journalism as, “The involvement of non-journalists in the gathering, writing, and dissemination of information,” (p.45). The public has an unprecedented amount of access to information and this permits them to exercise their own standard of newsworthiness, essentially acting as journalists for themselves (Fancher, 2009). “When everyone can be a publisher, what distinguishes the journalist?” (Fancher, 2009, p. 35). The majority of websites dedicated to citizen journalism are not regulated by any news organization (Niekamp, 2009). The emphasis with citizen journalism is on getting published regardless of whether the content has been filtered or edited and this practice diminishes the gatekeeping role of the traditional journalist (Niekamp, 2009). When citizen journalism first started to emerge on the web, blogs received the most recognition in terms of non-journalists provided news content (Niekamp, 2009).

Fancher (2009) cautions that citizen journalism may hurt the traditional tenets of journalism and wonders if William’s ‘Journalists Creed’ can stand strong with public service being at the forefront of journalism. “Today, anyone can perform the traditional functions of journalism, and thus arises a serious question about whether the kind of public service journalism Williams advocated can remain viable in the digital age (Fancher, 2009, p. 36). The practices that encompass citizen journalism, primarily the ability to disseminate news

content online, drastically alters the conventional values of journalism because some see this as less of a need for traditional journalists (Niekamp, 2009). This idea can be frightening for journalists who have dedicated their professional lives to practicing the craft of journalism.

### **Civic and Traditional Journalism: A Need for the Synthesis of the Two Models**

Arant and Meyer (1998) assert that public journalism places members of media in a position to promote community engagement, problem solve, and set the stage for community members to be active in the political process. The power of the press extends and connects with the average citizen. The marriage of the press with the public sphere can create content that is rich in meaning and intent. By including members of the community, media are able to provide audiences thorough perspectives and suggested solutions that come directly from the people they identify with. When community members actively participate in the news, it is likely others will follow suit. If one of the goals of public journalism is to stimulate debate and action, it would appear that it would be beneficial to involve citizens and their peers in the news that concerns their community. While the concept of public journalism attempts to revitalize civic engagement, many practicing journalists are cautious about acquiring its tenets.

Arant and Meyer (1998) conducted a study of 1,000 newspaper staffers to see how important traditional journalistic values and public journalistic values were to them in terms of their daily reporting work. The authors found that journalists support public journalism values, however, they are less likely to support journalistic practices that diverge from traditional journalism custom (p.213). They also reported strong support for traditional

journalistic roles. An average of 90% of the respondents expressed that serving as a watchdog of government, giving people the information they need to get through the day, getting the news first, and exposing wrongdoing were all functions that were very important to them when performing their daily work (p.213). When assessing the acceptance of public journalism values, Arant and Meyer noted the trend which showed public journalism appearing far more in the smaller-sized publications throughout the country. “Readers served by small and medium circulation newspapers were more likely to be exposed to public journalism projects than those served by large newspapers,” (p. 209).

One of the key research questions Arant and Meyer (1998) asked during their study was whether or not adopting support for public journalism values would compel the destruction of traditional journalism values. The authors found that there was no significant relationship associated with greater support of public journalism values and less support of traditional journalism values. They actually discovered that the journalists who attached a greater importance to public journalism values also demonstrated greater importance for traditional journalism values (p.214). The findings of this study indicate little support for public journalism roles. “Although journalists tend to identify with general values of public journalism, such as helping people in the community and helping the community solve problems, they are less supportive of an activist public journalism role,” (p. 215).

Public and traditional journalism are not polar opposites. According to Massey & Haas (2002), their meta-analysis of 47 studies illustrated that traditional and public journalism are similar in terms of their applications, philosophies, and how they ultimately influence news audiences, (p.576). They found many instances where journalists intertwine the characteristics of both traditional and public journalistic practices. “Journalists appear to have



a generally pluralistic attitudinal approach to newswork and this was reflected in coverage that displayed some of the presumably signature features of public and traditional journalism,” (p. 577).

A study conducted by Moscovitz (2002) examined the differences between the civic journalism approach and the traditional journalistic approach to covering a story on homelessness. The researcher conducted a content analysis of the *Charlotte Observer*, which is known for its support of public journalism, and the *Indianapolis Star*, a newspaper known for adhering to the traditional model of journalism, (p.63). The findings suggested that the civic journalism newspaper was more apt to utilize non-official sources in their stories. Both newspapers offered solutions to the problem of homelessness; however, the *Charlotte Observer* was more likely than the *Indianapolis Star* to use quotes that supported solutions to the community’s homelessness problem, (p.69 ). Moscovitz cautions that the findings of the study should not be overstated because readers may not even respond to the differences that are present such as the mobilizing information that was provided by the civic journalism paper. The author suggests that further research be conducted to determine if readers would be able to detect these types of differences (p.72).

### **Additional Considerations**

#### **Journalism and Marketing**

Teaching journalism students to recognize and value public affairs stories and veer away from strict conventional guidelines is no easy task. The current media environment has trained students to focus on what sells. The connection between marketing and reporting is very strong. This relationship is also very important to the survival of most news organizations. Many J school programs have multiple courses in marketing mixed with an

equal amount of traditional journalism classes. Lambeth and Aucoin (1993) have explained the importance of this relationship to the art of journalism. “Journalism and marketing do not often match happily, however, we need to be alert to new ways to monitor the developing marriage,” (p. 15). The developing relationship that these authors noticed is now in full effect nearly 20 years later. It is almost as if marketing and journalism are one being.

Distinguishing one from the other will be a challenging job for journalism teachers.

According to Lambeth and Aucoin, an audience- based approach where reporters respect the needs and intelligence of the audience works best. This may be an angle that many seasoned instructors and professors miss. “Veteran reporting instructors may believe they already equip their students to report on communities, but what they may be missing is the new level of perspective and combination of abilities required to do high quality public service journalism,” ( p. 13). Journalism educators can highlight the importance of understanding the significance of reporting for the public and community without undermining the need for marketing.

It is appropriate to offer examples of public journalism projects to examine their content and outcomes in terms of efficacy. The following project represents the civic journalism model and its principles. If the models of traditional journalism and civic journalism can be reconciled, projects like the following could be incorporated into traditional newsroom practices to augment the content they produce.

### **Teaching Public Journalism: The Palo Alto Project**

News writing takes an alternative route when the model of civic journalism is followed. Stories are looked at through a different lens to capture the narrative through the

eyes of average people, not just elitist officials. Many journalists are never formally taught to produce content using techniques that represent civic journalism. This select project illustrates how traditional journalists could perhaps blend various journalistic techniques from both models of journalism, hence enhancing their final product.

McDevitt (2000) argues that journalism instruction needs to prompt students to think outside the box and to look inward to personally assess the way they perceive their news writing experiences. He also suggests that students should evaluate the way news writing has affected the community around them. McDevitt asserts that an integrative approach, one that combines theory, evaluation and news writing, can be effective in teaching students how to be reflective writers and make a difference in their communities. Using ideas like those exercised in the Palo Alto project could perhaps enhance a traditional news story or series by utilizing civic journalism techniques while still anchoring the story in traditional form, showing all sides in a balanced manner. Acknowledging what works and what doesn't through analysis of select civic journalism projects assists in isolating certain techniques that can be extracted from the model and incorporated into the traditional model for augmentation. These analyses and recognitions will aid in the necessary synthesis of the two models.

The Palo Alto project is a prime example of a civic journalism project that made a difference for journalism students and the community as well. In 1997, the city of Palo Alto enacted an ordinance that forbade people from sitting or lying down in certain parts of the city. The ordinance was brought about after several business owners complained of panhandlers who had camped outside their businesses and this was intimidating their customer base, (p.42). The project was designed with the intent to help facilitate

communications between the homeless panhandlers, the city council, and the business owners. According to McDevitt, the students worked with the editors of the *Palo Alto Weekly*, who were very open to the tenets of civic journalism. The students named the story, *Sidewalk Standoff: Panhandling in Palo Alto*. The series consisted of students stories about the Palo Alto homeless population, utilizing reporting techniques such as intimate accounts of homeless individuals, first-person points of view from panhandlers (this included some of the students who were panhandlers for a day), and a synopsis of the information they obtained via a survey at their local homeless shelter, (Mcdevitt, 2000). At the end of their series, the *Palo Alto Weekly* held a roundtable discussion that consisted of some Palo Alto business owners, a homeless person, and members of the local city government, (p.46).

A media-based intervention such as the Palo Alto project can help procure dialogue and deliberation and in the best case scenario, assist in finding a solution to the problem. The students were able to practice civic journalism using various reporting methods and also implement a reflective approach towards their work. “Journalism training at the college level should challenge rather than reinforce professional habits that tend to value efficiency over critical thinking,” (McDevitt, 2000, p. 48). McDevitt argues that a journalism course that presents the integration of theory with practice provides students with the ability to take concepts and fit them into the design of a news writing assignment. A course that embraces this integrative approach may also uplift the standing of the journalism discipline in academia, (McDevitt, 2000). “If a student concludes that a project constituted a valuable experience, she is likely to assert this in terms of her contribution to the public life of a community,” (McDevitt, 200, p. 48). “The appearance of public journalism marks a serious effort to return journalism to the reputation it once had, and to restore the role of the press to

its original purpose which is to serve as a breeding place for opinions and ideas, a place worthy of elevation to the honored position it was given in the First Amendment,” (Altschull (1996), p. 167).

### **Journalism and Social Change**

Should promoting social change be a part of any model of journalism? Corrigan (1999) cites Rosen’s argument that journalism needs to be a force for problem solving and provide hope to the public. Rosen claims that this is done by breaking out of traditional journalistic routines and engaging people in the public sphere. He advocates for things such as creating journalistic task forces to examine local as well as national problems so that possible solutions can be examined (Corrigan, 1999). Rosen maintains creating a task force such as this would, “Investigate how journalism is serving some communities in finding answers to problems, while it is failing other communities that are drifting into failure,” (Corrigan, 1999, p. 116). According to Rosen (1999), playing the role of activist or advocate has not been a comfortable position for many current journalists to be in because it is seen as an abuse of power and a violation of the traditional journalistic ethic of objectivity. “Media could potentially affect what readers think by galvanizing public support for certain solutions or pressuring policy-makers to take action. In doing so, the press steps outside traditional boundaries of objectivity not only to be a part of the agenda-setting process but also to be directly involved in social problem-solving”, (Moscowitz, 2002, p. 64). Civic journalism may provide the opportunity for journalists to bring specific social issues into the public sphere by running a greater number of stories related to those issues or by emphasizing stories focused on their communities social problems (Moscowitz, 2002, p.64).

The research questions this study will explore are whether or not journalists will

support fulfilling a problem-solving role through their reporting and, what kinds of journalistic practices and goals are associated with their role as a journalist?

### **Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is appropriate for this research because of the flexibility and openness it permits. Grounded theory originated from Glaser and Strauss who had three primary objectives they included in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Bonner, Francis, & Mills, 2006). Their intent was to legitimize qualitative research, to offer rationale for theory that was grounded, and to explain the logic and details behind grounded theory (Bonner et al.).

Grounded theory operates freely, without the restrictions and order that one would find when conducting quantitative research. The research should begin with a general focus in mind, even if the initial design and concepts are not yet clear (McCallin, 2003). The method helps to interpret what is occurring at a certain time instead of explaining what should be occurring (McCallin, 2003). “Meanings assigned to data by the researcher are not fixed representations of truth but are temporary moments in an ongoing process of interpretation, (Moore, 2010). McCallin (2003) asserts the grounded theorist needs to keep an open mind throughout the entire process and this can at times pose a challenge for those who desire the safety of structure and boundaries during the research process. Grounded theory is not for everyone. “The researcher must be confident that he or she has proven analytical skills and is a capable abstract thinker,” (McCallin, p. 204). Moore claims that Glaser and Strauss did not suggest specific guidelines in terms of creating a focused research question. Instead, they suggested data collection should be centered around a ‘general subject area or

general sociological perspective' (Moore, 2010, p. 44).

The semi-structured interviews conducted are compatible with the grounded theory approach (Duffy, Ferguson & Watson, 2002). During a semi-structured interview the researcher is attempting to gather concentrated information and they ask specialized questions that help procure it (Duffy et al., 2002). According to Bonner et al., interviews are full of context and provide a setting for engaged interactions between researcher and participant. These interactions lead to, "results that are both mutually negotiated and contextual (Bonner, et al., 2006, p. 9). The respondents determine what issues are the most salient through the accounts they provide (Emami & Ghezelijeh, 2009). Grounded theory as a method requires the researcher to constantly compare data in order to form categories that will ultimately aid in formulating a theory based on the information provided by respondents (Emami & Ghezelijeh, 2009). The data are able to develop authentic patterns without being forced into categories.

Duffy, Ferguson and Watson (2002) suggested researchers who are new to grounded theory need to take into account the immediate analysis that should occur after collecting the data. They argue that waiting too much time between interviews and data analysis can result in missed opportunities in terms of emerging concepts. McCallin, (2003), also maintains that data analysis and collection should happen close together. Staying close to the data and interpreting them as soon as possible will most likely result in a more rigorous analysis.

The coding process can be exercised more than one way when using grounded theory. Selective coding is a focused approach to coding, allowing the researcher to direct their attention towards emerging concepts from large amounts of data (Emami & Ghezelijeh, 2009). Line by line coding involves creating action codes that help the researcher exercise

the constant comparison task as they go back and forth from the data, respondents, and categories (p.19).

Generating a grand theory does not need to be the final goal. A grand theory is a theory that is designed to explain all aspects of a given phenomenon (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010). The goal of grounded theory is more geared towards conceptualization rather than theoretical development when dealing with smaller scale studies, (McCallin, 2003). Moore (2010) cites Glaser and Strauss's interpretation of theory generation.

Generating theory is an indefinite developing process and should not be considered a finished product (Moore, 2010). The process and outcome when administering grounded theory is not exact and does not deliver perfection. "Traditional grounded theorists believe that there is a 'real' reality but that it can only be imperfectly perceived," (Bonner et. al, 2006).

An important aspect of conducting any form of qualitative research is showing how you arrived at your findings. What steps did the researcher take on her road to understanding the phenomena in question? Bowen (2008) suggests creating an "audit trail" to help increase transparency of the research process. "Qualitative researchers who frame their studies in an interpretive paradigm focus on trustworthiness as opposed to the conventional, positivistic criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity," (p. 306). According to Bowen, the audit trail is a systematically documented account of how the data was collected to the final stages of analysis. He reports that illustrating how concepts and themes emerged from the data and ultimately found their way in to the theorized conclusion, helps to establish the dependability of the findings of the study. Other confirmability techniques mentioned by Bowen are member checking, purposive sampling and conveying information using thick description. Member checking is one of the most important practices used for establishing



credibility of data because it provides clarification and substantiation (p.311).

Another aspect of grounded theory that may aid in increasing the trustworthiness and reliability of the research is the skill of theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sensitivity demonstrates an ability on the part of the researcher to be extremely aware of the information being provided to them by respondents and the ability to distinguish between data that is useful and data that may not pertain to the overall purpose of the study (Bowen, 2008).

Combining the art of theoretical sensitivity with a well put together audit trail can help a grounded theorist establish credibility when inductively constructing a theory from their data. Throughout the research process, it will be beneficial to be cognizant of the fact that conducting grounded theory is a process that may not yield overwhelming results, but if taken seriously, it can generate an authentic understanding of the subject under examination.

## **Methods**

To qualitatively analyze the roles of traditional and public journalism, exploratory field research was conducted. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to provide a comprehensive perspective that aids in developing a deeper understanding of the relationship. The interviews allowed for a multitude of authentic perspectives to be gathered and interpreted. A total of nine in-depth interviews comprised the data for this study. The interviewees were selected using specific criteria. They are either working journalists or have professionally practiced journalism in the past (e.g., retired writer, reporter). Finding subjects who have experience within the models of both traditional and public journalism aided in establishing validity because they offer professional perspectives from differing philosophies.

The research method is based on grounded theory. As the interviews were conducted,

data emerged that helped guide the direction of the study. New theories developed from the information that was received from the subjects. It was predicted that signs that point to existing theories will unfold as the data began to reveal certain patterns and characteristics. Grounded theory allows the data to take on their own form and function. The ability to find connections between theory and data helps to produce authentic explanations for certain phenomena that occur in relation to civic and traditional journalism. This qualitative approach allowed for flexibility and created a certain level of anticipation because the research was traveling down an unknown path. The intent of this study is to provide an interpretive analysis of the data that will encourage future inquiry, not an exact measurement of the relationship.

### **Sampling Groups and Characteristics**

The respondents were selected from a variety of different media backgrounds to ensure there was a diverse pool from which to collect data. There were subjects from the newspaper industry, the television industry, and subjects that have experience in web journalism. Data collection from respondents who have experience in a myriad of mediums provided an encompassing introspection of the overall thoughts and feelings with respect to public and traditional journalism. Respondents from alternative publications were included in the sample to augment the traditional media perspectives and support maintaining a balance among the data set. Every effort was made to recruit both male and female respondents to participate in the study. There was also an attempt to pursue respondents who were disparate in terms of ethnicity and age. Since the research relied primarily on a convenience sample amongst a specific professional population, the goal relating to ethnic diversity was not

attained. Most of the respondents were Caucasian. Some of the initial respondents offered names and contact information of colleagues and therefore snowball sampling was exercised to strengthen the sample.

The decision to conduct an interview in person or over the phone was entirely up to the interviewee. There were circumstances and time constraints that prevented some respondents from meeting face to face. The opportunity to interview over the phone and record the session was offered to all respondents. In the latter case, the consent form was hand-delivered or emailed to the respondent. Purposive sampling was employed considering the study sought to recruit solely journalists or former (e.g., retired) journalists.

Respondent one is a working journalist and editor for a small newspaper. She has been in the media industry for about two years. Respondent two is an editor of an alternative publication and has been a writer and editor for over ten years. Respondent three is editor of a community-based publication. He has been in the business of writing and editing for 35 years. Respondent four has been a writer, managing editor, and copyeditor. She no longer works in the media industry. Respondent five is a university professor with experience in writing and public relations. Respondent six is a professor who has also been a writer for a large circulation newspaper. Respondent seven is a multimedia journalist and has been a writer for a medium circulation newspaper for several years. She has worked as a television anchor, reporter, and web producer. Respondent eight is a former writer for a large circulation newspaper. She worked for the publication for over 20 years. Respondent nine is an executive producer and anchor for a television news show. She has been involved in media for over ten years.

## **Data Collection**

In order to capture all of the information needed for the study, several procedures were employed. The actual interview process took approximately 45 minutes, with some interviews exceeding that amount of time and some falling short of it. During the interview, the data was digitally recorded and handwritten notes were taken. Research memos were also useful for later use during the transcription process. An interview schedule listing the questions relevant to the research was used as an instrument to guide the process. As the interview progressed and new information emerged, additional questions arose during some interviews. These semi-structured interviews were able to evolve naturally to accommodate unexpected discoveries; however, all of the questions on the original interview schedule were answered. All of the questions are open-ended and participants were probed to encourage them to elaborate if their answers were partial or lacking description.

The interview schedule of questions is listed as follows:

### **General Questions**

1. What is the community role of the journalist reporting news?
2. What do the public expect from journalists in terms of serving the community? Do they just want to be informed, or is there an expectation for more?
3. What role do media play in terms of encouraging or discouraging solutions to problems?

### **Social Change Questions**

4. How can media be a force for social change? Should they be promoting change?
5. Does public journalism include informing our community about foreign news? Does it matter if it's outside *our* community?

6. How can media present accurate representations of all groups of the community?
7. How do you select your sources?
8. Should journalists play a role in solving problems within their community?
9. Should encouraging political participation and deliberation be a goal of journalism? Why or why not?
10. What types of journalistic techniques do you think best serve the goals of public journalism?
11. What types of journalistic practices do you believe best serve the tenets of traditional journalism?
12. Overall, which model of journalism do you feel suits the role of the press in the United States today? Why?
13. What suggestions can you offer to journalists and educators in terms of providing a journalistic model that could perhaps combine traditional and public journalism practices? Do you believe this combination would produce positive or negative effects? Why?

The answers to the interview questions aided in developing a map of possible theories and classifications of concepts to work with. They are relevant to the overall study because they question the practices, techniques, and effects of traditional and public journalism models. Listening to the assessments and recommendations of experienced professionals in the field of journalism assisted in creating a valid summary of the various customs and functions of both models of journalism. These questions were building blocks for further elaboration by the interviewees if they wished to expand their thoughts and provide additional information that may have been prompted by one of the original questions. They provided a solid

foundation for analysis and also left room for probing and augmentation.

Establishing rapport with the participants was key in developing a good researcher-interviewee relationship. Especially when utilizing techniques such as probing, it was important to have developed a trusting relationship with the interviewee. One of the ways rapport was established with respondents was by letting them know that as a researcher, my duty is to be objective and non-judgmental. This increased the comfort level for both parties and aided in generating more thoughtful responses to the questions. Careful transitions during the interview assisted in maintaining a good flow for the duration of the meeting. Active listening by the researcher married with a legitimate interest in the participant and the information they were contributing appeared to be a formula for eliciting profound responses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The participants were given an informed consent that outlined the purpose of the research as well as any adverse effects or feelings that may arise as a result of the interview. The confidentiality of the participants is protected, with no identifiers present. With this particular topic, there were not a host of negative side effects that were anticipated. The research is not associated with any techniques that would cause harm to a participant and ethical considerations, including absolute anonymity, is given the utmost respect. The language in the consent form is clearly understandable so that the interviewee could decide whether or not they wanted to voluntarily participate. There were additional signature lines for respondents present on the consent document to obtain permission for the interviews to be audiotaped. The decision to conduct an interview in person or over the phone was entirely up to the interviewee. Where time constraints prevented people from meeting face to face, the opportunity to speak over the phone and record the session was offered as an alternative. In

the latter case, the consent form was either hand delivered or emailed to the respondent.

### **Data Analysis**

After the data were collected, the interviews were transcribed and the refinement process began. Theory building was possible by examining and reexamining patterns that emerge from the data. This type of research is expected to produce rich data that is thick in description. The data from the interviews were transcribed into text and making sense of the information was made possible by exercising thematic analysis and using grounded theory. Thematic analysis was applied to examine the recurrent patterns that have emerged from the data. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and emergent patterns (Aronson, 1994). “From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences can be listed. This can come from direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas,” (Aronson, 1994, p.1). The data, literature review, and theories aided in forming themes. Fleshing out the text and identifying common themes assisted in creating categories of concepts that were later used to organize all of the data. Careful examination and dissection of the transcribed interviews was necessary to uncover themes and patterns that are deposited in the data. Line-by-line coding was performed to discover recurring concepts deposited in the transcribed data. Phrases and words were color-coded to organize emerging themes and sub-themes. Finding related concepts, patterns and themes aided in theory building from the data.

A limited number of themes were identified after cleaning the data. The intent of the study was to comprehensively examine three to five primary themes that emerged from the data to explain certain phenomena that are present. Ideally, themes that represent and pertain to traditional and public journalism models would be equal so there is a balance among the classification of themes. Categorizing the themes under the public journalism section and the

traditional journalism classification will help to separate the models so that sub-categories can be placed under them accordingly. However, given that this research is exploratory, equity of classifications throughout the entire thematic analysis could be guaranteed. From the final data analysis, five themes emerged, with some themes having sub-themes and some themes standing alone.

After the patterns were identified and categorized, the findings were compared with the literature review to interpret a comprehensive picture of the study. Analysis of the similarities and differences relating to the literature and the interview data are presented. Weaving these components into one another establishes validity of the research and makes sense of the data to readers. Generating a theory or linking the data to current theory is possible through this process. Integrating the literature also allows for inferences to be made and help support the patterns that may have emerged along the way. A proposed theoretical explanation for the data is reported. The emergent themes are identified and an interpretation of the data is reported.

### **Validity Measures**

Member checking was administered during the final stages of the research to test the interpretations in the data collected from the respondents. Given the sample size is relatively small, thirty three percent of the subjects underwent this process. Three respondents were randomly selected to verify what had been interpreted and reported from their interviews. Data extracts that related to each respective respondent were read aloud in detail and the respondent was given the opportunity to respond. They were asked if the researcher's interpretations were accurate or if there were discrepancies present. Each member check actualized verification from the respondents that their contributions to the study had been



accurately interpreted. The member check responses were audio taped with the permission of the respondents. Member checking assists in increasing the validity and credibility of the study.

Another trustworthiness measure that was exercised was an independent review of the transcript data performed by a fellow graduate student in the Journalism and Media Studies Department. The reviewer looked through every interview transcript to see if he identified the same themes as the researcher did in this study. The independent reviewer confirmed that he recognized all five themes as emergent from the data.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Examining the various effects that civic journalism has on journalism as a whole aids in determining the future use of the model. Reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of public and traditional journalism techniques helps in assessing the efficacy of the practice. Is it just an idea and experiment with a label attached to it or is the practice of civic journalism a bona fide journalistic paradigm? If it is determined that civic journalism is in fact a genuine practice that produces positive results, do these results come at the expense of the traditional journalistic standard?

Collecting data pertaining to these questions from journalism professionals provides an authentic understanding from which determinations for future research can be made. If it is discovered that the perception of civic journalism and its tenets should be utilized with caution, perhaps further inquiry can uncover the reasons behind these feelings of distrust and hesitation. On the other hand, the findings may point to the embrace and acceptance of the model. In the latter case, a study that focuses solely on what civic journalistic projects appear to produce the most effective outcomes may be advantageous for the journalism and media

studies community.

Regardless of the patterns that have emerged from these data, it is beneficial on all fronts to dig deeper into the realm of understanding certain journalistic practices and how they operate and affect audiences. The distinguished role of the press has an obligation to itself as an institution and to the people to maintain the most professional standards possible while delivering information to the public. Knowing what journalistic techniques and practices advance the well-being of the people and at the same time preserve the integrity and professionalism of the press should be at the top of the priority list for journalists who take their duty seriously.

The thematic analysis illuminated the key issues that emanated from the data. The building blocks for the next study can be constructed utilizing the emergent themes that were discovered from this research.

### **Analysis of Findings**

Five primary themes emerged from the data: *Objectivity*, *Journalists as Problem-Solvers*, *Confusion with the Term Public Journalism*, *Encouraging Political Deliberation and Participation*, and *Dedication to the Traditional*. Each of these themes is unique and has traits that are interesting and significant. The most compelling theme was Theme one: *Objectivity*, because every respondent conveyed some allegiance to this traditional journalistic value. The most surprising theme was Theme three, *Confusion with the Term Public Journalism*, because of the overwhelming consensus in terms of not knowing what constituted public journalism. Theme two, *Journalists as Problem-Solvers*, was interesting

because the differentiation was essentially sliced right down the middle with half believing it is the role of the journalist to solve problems and the other half indicating disapproval for the problem solving role. One respondent was ambivalent in terms of her description of the role. Of the five overarching themes, many of them were formed via answering questions listed on the interview schedule. However, some formed organically without having a connection to any of the original interview questions. Theme three is an example of where this occurred. This is acceptable because of the flexible nature of the interviews. The data evolved without being forced in any particular way. The primary objective during the interviews was to gain authentic perspectives from professional journalists to better understand the way they practice and see the two types of journalism. Overall, the dominant themes display the primary convictions and views of these nine journalism professionals. Their authentic contributions assist in gaining an understanding of the journalistic roles and practices they value.

### **Theme one: Objectivity**

One of the primary themes that emerged from the raw data was the concept of objectivity. The majority of the respondents expressed a profound dedication to the notion of objectivity. The theme is identified and flagged with indicators such as the use of the words, facts, truth, balance, fairness, lack of bias and neutrality. These terms repeatedly appeared throughout the text, indicating the importance of the theme. The findings here are interesting because in the traditional-public journalism dilemma, objectivity is often mentioned as a trait that can at times be abandoned while practicing public journalism. The following explanations are provided so that readers can gain perspective in terms of the respondents'

feelings relating to the theme of objectivity:

**Respondent 1:** Indicated that the public expects objectivity in journalism. “Everyone knows a journalist should be objective.” She adds that while the public has an expectation for objectivity, they also are willing to abandon their demand for it if it interferes with their personal beliefs. In the latter case, then the public wants the type of journalism that coincides with their personal point of view. From a journalist’s perspective, according to Respondent 1, achieving objectivity in traditional journalism is one of the key practices in creating a good report or story. She asserts that the beat reporter (as opposed to a general assignment reporter), will have an easier time providing readers with a solid final product as long as they are not throwing subjectivity into their stories gratuitously. This comment was in response to a question that related to source selection, but brought forth instead a salient point in terms of her feelings about objectivity. She feels that a traditional journalist who is grounded in the ethical obligations of the model can practice public journalism safely because they are already trained to value objective reporting. On the other hand, she cites that starting at public journalism without the foundation of the traditional model would mean a departure into rampant subjectivity. She maintained that it is very hard to learn objectivity. She also declared that it is just as hard to sound objective. Journalists, she said, are human and they have subjective ideas. She thinks it would be much easier to ask a traditional journalist to attempt public journalism and put some human feeling in their stories than it would to ask a reporter practicing civic journalism to all of a sudden write in the traditional, purely objective style. “To take public journalism back to the statistics reporting of traditional journalism is a really uncomfortable task because objectivity and traditional journalism is not a natural way of being, it’s uncomfortable when you start it.”

**Respondent 2:** The public wants factual accuracy as well as objectivity. He said that he doesn't think that the public really understands the meaning of true objectivity or how it's achieved and if that achievement is even possible. He expressed the importance of leaving ideology out of the process of presenting the facts. He notes that if a reporter's ideology tells them there is a problem, then they can report on solutions to that problem without letting their own opinion get in the way. His idea of what traditional journalism represents includes, "good, solid, objective reporting." He also notes that this practice is not enough for declining readership. "This idea of pure objectivity is a destructive one." He would like to see more of an emphasis on fairness rather than pure objectivity. He says that it is difficult for the reporter to fully remove himself from a story. He notes that simply by having the power to choose what is included or omitted from a story, the journalist himself is breaching objectivity. He suggests that training journalists to apply fairness would be a better option than the current practice of objectivity which he says gives the same amount of weight to each side. "Traditional objectivity has definitely eroded the idea of authority, experience, and expertise. If you have someone on one side of an issue who has years of study and experience and somebody on the other side who has a really angry opinion, traditional objectivity would give them both the same weight. I think that's a bad way to practice journalism."

**Respondent 3:** When asked if it was acceptable for a news media outlet to host a forum for citizens to come and participate in a roundtable discussion with political players in their community, respondent 3 expressed that it would be okay as long as there were political candidates that were represented on both sides or if all of the invited candidates in the roundtable discussion were allowed to express themselves and be heard. "As long as there's a clear delineation that the newspaper is being neutral, that they are the facilitator." He stressed

the importance of the media organization not endorsing any particular candidate at such an event. In his opinion, favoring a candidate only has a place in the editorial section of the paper.

**Respondent 4:** She asserted that it is crucial not to be persuasive when writing and reporting the news. She suggests just including the facts and letting audiences decide for themselves how to act on the information. She claims that getting the public involved in a story along with experts can aid in providing a balance and display each side equally. Compromising objectivity can be dangerous because the public will lose trust in the journalist. She blames lack of objectivity as a reason for declining audiences for some news organizations; “People get sick of hearing public service stuff all of the time. It’s the reason NPR doesn’t have the biggest audience in the world, because people can’t stand journalism that has an aim all the time.” She compared it to listening to political music all of the time.

**Respondent 5:** Journalism is expected to produce honest and balanced content. She argues that a journalist’s job is to present balanced and fair information to the public and to make sure they are not persuading people to think in a certain fashion. It is not their job to advocate for a particular solution to the issue being presented in story form. Her view of traditional journalism includes fact finding and reporting in an unbiased manner. She claims that both traditional journalism as well as civic journalism should practice including as many sides to the story as possible. Providing fair and balanced information is very important to her. The word balance was discovered four times in her interview transcript. “Should media be promoting one side versus another? I don’t think so.”

**Respondent 6:** Being objective will assist in attracting audience members from a variety of different persuasions. He argues that the most appropriate role for a reporter is shedding light

on issues that matter to the public and doing so in a way that just presents the best selection of facts. He suggests offering these facts to the audience and subsequently let them decide what to do about them. According to Respondent 6, holding on to a job in journalism can depend on the reporters' ability to maintain objectivity. "If you want to hold on to your job long term, just the facts is generally the best strategy." He cites that in order to establish and maintain credibility with readers, it is important to stay centered and play the middle ground.

**Respondent 7:** In her opinion, the journalists' role is to inform the public without injecting bias into their content. She asserts that it is essential to filter information before presenting it and to ensure that opinion on the part of the reporter is omitted from the report. She emphasizes the significance of being aware of potential bias as a reporter. "Journalists as individuals have to be careful about ushering people into one arena or the other. You have to be committed to telling both sides of the story." She claims that if a journalist is cognizant about making sure both sides of an issue are represented, then they are fulfilling their role as a reporter. "A reporter is a distributor of information and should not be somebody who is playing God with that information." She suggests taking yourself as a journalist out of the situation ideologically and then presenting the readers with solutions so that they can make informed decisions for themselves and act according to their beliefs. "No journalist should be pushing their ideology on the gray areas like gay marriage. What you need to be doing is presenting the information as cleanly as possible and telling both sides of the story." She mentioned that the 1960's and 1970's were considered a journalistic utopia in terms of objectivity and unbiased information. She says that era was the closest journalism has come to unbiased information.

**Respondent 8:** Respondent 8 provided some historical context that helped to explain the

emergence of objectivity from her perspective. She said that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were several newspaper outlets in a town and oftentimes, the names of the paper reflected the political positions they stood for. She used the example of the *Albany Democrat*. She added that when the wire service began sending out news to all of the various newspapers, the papers were then faced with the challenge of having to write news that would be published in the Democratic newspapers as well as the Republican newspapers. She says because of this, a business decision was made to remove opinion from the news section of the paper. “Now, it became kind of an ethic and aesthetic that the news should be pure without opinion.”

When asked about what she would consider the best journalistic techniques and practices of public journalism, allusions to objectivity were apparent in her answer. “The basics, the fundamental skills of finding the news and being fair and thorough.” Fairness was also mentioned when she was asked the same question regarding traditional journalism. She said she would suggest training journalists in the “just the facts ma’am” type of journalism. One of the solutions she offers for maintaining objectivity is looking for something that is clearly wrong and not political in any way. “You can pretty easily take a position in a story without violating the journalistic ethic of not taking sides.”

**Respondent 9:** Mentioned objectivity five times following an interview question pertaining to the tenets of traditional journalism.

The theme of objectivity patterned displays a commitment by respondents to the traditional ethic of maintaining fair practices. Giving equal weight to both sides when reporting on a story appeared to be a dominant pattern among respondents. Departing from the value of objectivity did not seem to be an option for any of the respondents, with the exception of Respondent 2 from the sample. There was a strong desire to adhere to the



traditional value and this was communicated through repeated remarks pertaining to fairness, unbiased content, balance, and ensuring equal attention to both sides of a story.

### **Summary of Theme one**

Among the sample, there was a strong expectation in terms of the overall responsibility as a journalist to maintain objectivity. Many respondents suggest objectivity is something that is simply a given in the profession of journalism, no matter what label is attached to the model. Compromising objectivity meant bordering on advocacy and also losing credibility with audiences. The high number of respondents expressing an allegiance to objectivity implies this value is deeply engrained in the practices and philosophies of many trained journalists.

### **Theme two- Journalists as problem solvers**

The theme labeled “*Journalists as Problem Solvers*” is salient because of its significance to the overall purpose of the study, which aims to understand which journalistic model and its practices best serve the public and whether a synthesis of the two models would be beneficial. Civic journalism tends to lean towards a problem-solving paradigm, while traditional journalism at times presents a problem but often omits possible solutions from the finished product. Several respondents indicated that the traditional journalistic model was indeed one that contributed to solving problems. However, some respondents felt that journalism is not a vehicle for providing solutions to problems. Its role is to simply present the issue and then take a step back and let the public decide how to act on the presented information. This theme was a key finding because it helps to dissect the controversial feeling present when it comes to journalists fulfilling the role of problem

solver. Some respondents feel journalists inherently solve problems. They say this is the nature of the job. Others argue journalists' roles are to report the facts and the rest is up to the public.

Interview transcripts from respondents were manually coded to flag terms and phrases that indicated either support for the journalistic role of problem-solving or disapproval of the role. The respondents' reactions to the concept of a journalist as a problem-solver are cited via the following data extracts:

**Differentiation:** Respondents 2, 7, 8, supported fulfilling a problem-solving role as a journalist.

Respondents 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 expressed cautiousness when considering a problem-solving journalistic role.

**Respondent 1:** In terms of fulfilling a problem-solving role, she suggests determining if that role is going to be taken on in advance. The news organization would decide if that is their role. She also said that if helping people becomes a primary role, there has to be some way of choosing which person or people to help in any given situation. She noted that journalists should not be presenting the answers to problems up front. It is best to present the facts and doing that often reinforces the beliefs of the audience. "I think we end up going back to a story that was written a year ago and saying 'this is what happened,' when the solution is finally reached but I don't think that the reporting necessarily influenced the solution." She believes that on some level, every story can be linked to problem solving. "As long as we don't present it as hard, objective news in the way that we present other news, that's fine. We are still fulfilling our role as problem-solvers which is what we always do."

**Respondent 2:** "I'm a big believer in trying to report towards solutions." He said that

journalism should be a source for problem solving and that the more informed people are, the better off society is. He advocated including solutions to problems when reporting as well as devoting more resources to figuring out what solutions may work well for a particular issue. He did say that while solving problems should be a fundamental journalistic role, it should not impede upon the factual information a journalist is presenting. He stated that journalism should be a force for enlightenment and that media can use the information they gather to try to make things better.

**Respondent 3:** He does not think that a journalist should play the role of problem-solver. He posits that grass-roots and local-level organizations are more apt to present an issue and simultaneously put forth constructive solutions to problems. He said the task for many outlets is simply getting their publication out on a daily basis. Going beyond that by presenting solutions is providing a real public service.

**Respondent 4:** She communicated that there is an expectation for journalists to fix things that are wrong. If they do not fix a problem, they are held responsible or blamed by the public. “If something bad happens and journalists don’t catch it, it’s like why didn’t you guys catch this before? What were you doing with your time?” She acknowledges that journalists sometimes offer solutions, but doesn’t think they should encourage solutions to the extent that they do. She concedes when journalists put forth solutions, they are putting ideas into people’s heads. “I guess it’s sort of hand-picking what’s going to occur and that’s really not our job. You’re building a solution and that is not good.” She suggests reporting accurately but be cautious of crossing the line of offering definitive solutions to readers. “You are innately solving problems by bringing problems to light. There would be no problem if you didn’t acknowledge it. That’s part of the problem solving process.” She argues that

journalists are problem solvers just by the nature of what they do.

**Respondent 5:** Respondent does not agree that the role of a journalist to be a problem solver. “In traditional news reporting, it’s not the reporters’ job to advocate for a solution.” She argues later in the interview that journalism does in fact solve problems through providing the public with accurate information so they are equipped to make decisions about to solutions to their problems. “It’s not the journalists’ role to advocate one solution over another, but they have a valuable role in problem solving.”

**Respondent 6:** He does not think that journalists should directly play the role of problem-solver. He sees this as a reporter going out and actually making themselves part of the story. “This is where the traditional journalist and the civic journalist have sort of split ways and they don’t see eye to eye.” He argues that the civic journalist will take it upon themselves initiate change and solutions, instead of traveling the traditional route and just reporting the problem and presenting the facts to the public. A reporters job is to tell the story, it’s not to be the person who initiates the change directly.”

**Respondent 7:** She attests media play a “huge” role in encouraging solutions to issues. “Media are the only things measuring progress because they are holding everyone accountable report by report.” She cautions that reporters need to keep their egos in check in terms of taking a problem solving role. “Sometimes journalists want to solve problems and they only create them.” She points out that without the interference of egotism, journalists can play a big role in problem solving. “Journalists have the ability to solve problems, but maybe they shouldn’t be too obvious about it.” She suggests journalists help audience members make connections and when faced with a problem, give them options on both sides. “I think ideally, you’re not telling the full story if you’re not giving someone the potential to

act on it or get to a solution.” She also suggests the reporter take herself out of the situation ideologically and offer audiences a variety of solutions.

**Respondent 8:** “Journalists have always been in the mix of offering solutions.” She cites the important role media have played in problem solving. She includes examples such as Hank Greenspun brokering a deal in the 1960’s to desegregate the Las Vegas Strip. “Newspapers as institutions constantly come up with solutions.” She claims that these solutions usually come from the management level not from individual journalists themselves. “When a journalist gets involved in a long-term investigative piece, the editor will look at the story and say, where’s your solution to this?” She claims problem solving happens frequently at the management level and also some via enterprise reporting. “The problem solving has to come from the institutional level in terms of offering solutions as part of story. No individual journalist should be able to bring that power to bear, because that’s a tremendous amount of power.”

**Respondent 9:** “I think it depends on how you define problem-solver. It’s not the role of journalists to advocate for one solution over another.” The journalists’ role is to identify and present the problem, not to offer the solutions they deem best. She says it’s okay to acknowledge there is a problem and then present the experts who recommend solutions to the audience. “Hopefully, this will spur the public into some sort of action. They should present options, and inform the public of options, but not advocating. No.” She suggests offering a variety of alternatives and solutions to the audience and making them aware of the issues and options. She said it is good to acknowledge that there is a problem and that something needs to be done about it. Having experts in the field recommend the alternatives is what she thinks works best in terms of problem-solving.

### ***Sub-Theme 1- Journalism, Social Change, and Advocacy.***

Connected to the theme of “*Journalist as Problem-Solver*” is a sub-theme that presented itself during the data reduction process. The concept of social change and advocacy and their relation to journalism brought forth varied responses from participants of the study. Similar to the reactions present in the overarching Theme two, some respondents demonstrated a reluctance to associate the notion of social change with the practice of journalism. There were several responses that indicated this concept was associated with advocacy journalism or activism. Others, however, valued an alliance of journalism and social change. The data demonstrate a mixed response that is essentially balanced, with half indicating support for the relationship and the other half expressing disapproval for such an affiliation.

**Differentiation:** Respondents 2, 6, 7, and 8 agree that journalism is a force for social change and journalists on some level have a role to play in this process.

Respondents 1, 3, 4, 5 are all cautious about this concept. Respondents 3 and 4 both refer to editorializing and the opinion section when referring to the coupling of journalism and social change.

**Respondent 1:** In terms of promoting social change, she did not provide a definitive answer. “I don’t know that there’s a right answer. I think it depends on the venue.” She said it’s appealing to tell heartwarming stories about helping people but that this is not always the right decision to make as a journalist or news organization. She also stressed that when it comes to deciding whether or not to write stories in this style, it should be decided in advance by the news organization.

**Respondent 2:** “Your belief in change can guide your overall reporting.” He argues that to some degree, journalists should be advocating for positive social change, but cautions reporters to not let their advocacy get in the way of reporting the facts.

**Respondent 3:** He asserts advocating change is a form of editorializing and belongs on the editorial page. “There’s a place for trying to create change, but I think that’s easily abused and I think that’s something that newspapers need to be very aware of. There needs to be a different set of rules for the news pages and the editorial pages.”

**Respondent 4:** She explains that a journalist should report the truth and if that leads to change then so be it. Active promotion, though, is a walking a fine line. “Don’t be so persuasive. Just report the facts and see how that goes over with people, because if something is completely morally incomprehensible people will take your side anyway.” She defends the right to promote change in the opinion or editorial section of the newspaper. She expresses the need to tell stories that affect people and help them but do so without pressing too hard. “You can’t take such a heavy role that you are pushing people, because the more you push people the more they can push back and then you are becoming almost divisive.”

**Respondent 5:** “Good, solid information automatically promotes social change. It should be the public that decides what that change is-not the media.” She declares that media promotes social change by reporting the truth to the public. The public is then supposed to take the information given to them and from there the best ideas will be adopted. “The good stuff is supposed to float to the top, if you will.”

**Respondent 6:** “If it weren’t for the press, we wouldn’t have American society as we know it.” He provided context with historical examples of problems that were resolved because of pressure from the press. Examples included the right to vote for African-Americans and

women, and the civil rights movement. “Those are big sweeping changes.” He testifies that media shed light on salient issues and sometimes that results in changes taking place.

**Respondent 7:** She asserts that media play an accountability role and that role can produce change. “They take a baton where other institutions fail, especially political institutions in terms of protecting citizens.” She cites an example of a series that resulted in sweeping changes to a healthcare policy. “Journalism can really save lives.” She suggests putting more resources into stories that can make a difference. “You may not get the most pages, but you may ultimately make sweeping changes. As idealistic as it sounds, I think that’s why everybody gets in to journalism. You hope that on some level, you can make changes that matter.”

**Respondent 8:** “Media can absolutely be a force for social change.” She uses the muckrakers as examples to illustrate the way journalists’ involvement has helped to better society. She also cited Upton Sinclair’s book as another source for journalism that resulted in significant societal change. “People get into this field because they are passionate about life and want life to be better. You want to fix the wrongs that you see.” This instinct, she said, pushes the journalist towards the desire to change society. “Yes, journalists do try to change society, but they are careful about the issues they select.”

**Respondent 9:** “Journalists have an obligation to go beyond the facts of a story and seek out potential solutions and present them but not to advocate for one or the other. Maybe to advocate for change and I probably fall more in the advocacy journalism realm.” She clarified that by advocacy, she means presenting different viewpoints and solutions, not just problems. “Say there’s something wrong here and something needs to be done about it.” As for doing anything further than that, she said that would then be the role of an opinion



journalist or a columnist. When an inequity or injustice has occurred, she suggests that going beyond presenting facts, experts, and possible solutions would be an editorial function. “I don’t really think it’s the reporter’s role to give his opinion. There’s a place for that and it should be clearly delineated.” She maintains that there needs to be a separation between the news department and the rest of the institution. In terms of advocacy, she cites the exception as opinion journalism.

### **Summary of Theme two**

The theme of *Journalist as Problem-Solver* seemed to prompt mixed feelings in terms of the role and what it entails specifically. Several respondents supported the notion of presenting a problem to the public and then subsequently releasing their involvement to allow the people to decide what appropriate action should follow. There was hesitance when it came to the idea of holding the public’s hand and leading them to the solution deemed best by the journalist or news organization.

Another segment of the theme that reoccurred was the belief that journalism itself is in the business of solving problems, just by bringing them to the attention of audiences. Giving people the tools to make informed decisions is considered playing a problem solving role to some of the respondents. In terms of providing solutions to problems, a few respondents suggest offering a variety of solutions for people to choose from.

The sub-theme, *Journalism, Social Change, and Advocacy*, closely connects to the primary properties of Theme two. Again, there were varied convictions when considering journalism immersed in the problem-solving realm. Approximately half of respondents feel this role would be teetering on the line of advocacy. This subsample felt that this type of reporting has to be approached with caution. The other respondents indicate media do in fact

play an important role in solving problems and inciting social change. There were specific examples of stories and series provided to support their beliefs that journalism is a vehicle for change. Respondents cite historical problems such as the suffrage movement, segregation, sanitary standards, and healthcare policies as ways to illustrate their views that journalism is in the business of promoting change by exposing injustices.

### **Theme 3: Confusion defining public journalism**

An interesting theme emerged from the data in terms of pinning down a precise definition of the term public journalism. There was confusion with nearly every respondent as to what public journalism meant. A variety of different definitions were put forth by respondents attempting to describe what the term symbolized to them on a personal and professional level. This theme prompted the discovery of two sub-themes that aid in dissecting the meanings under the umbrella theme of Confusion Defining Public Journalism. The varied responses by participants indicate that there is not a set, precise definition for public journalism, just as the literature has described. Each authentic answer displayed a unique description of the term and its practices. There was never a homogenous understanding across the dataset to signify consensus of understanding with the term or what it represents.

**Differentiation:** Respondents 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 demonstrate confusion when presented with the term.

Respondents 1, 4, do not indicate confusion with the term.

Respondent 6 appears to have his own definition that does not coincide with the literature;

however, he does not display confusion with the term.

The following data selections elicit the perplexity surrounding public journalism:

**Respondent 1:** She did not demonstrate confusion with the term or idea of public journalism. “I think there is a disappointing tendency among people who espouse public journalism to make synonymous public journalism and hyper-local journalism and I don’t think they are the same thing. You do hyper-local journalism because you know people care about things that are happening in your community. You do public journalism because there are important stories to tell regardless of their ‘newsworthiness’.”

**Respondent 2:** “Well first of all, what definition of public journalism are we using here?” He said sometimes public journalism denotes involving the public in the actual production of news.

**Respondent 3:** “I’m not clear on the definition of public journalism.”

**Respondent 4:** Throughout the interview, respondent did not exhibit lack of clarity with the term.

**Respondent 5:** “I’m not sure what you mean by public media. I guess where I’m getting confused, traditional journalism as opposed to what?” When the term was then presented to her as “civic journalism,” she responds, “It’s a language issue.” The confusion around the term continues... “Public journalism to me is opposed to publishing or in-house publishing, which is also kind of nebulous. Civic journalism to me is people who are not working for traditional news outlets. It’s unmediated journalism is the way I look at it.”

**Respondent 6:** He describes civic journalism as a movement intended for people who are powerless and those who may not have access to large media networks but want to make change happen. He cites blogs as examples of things that somehow “pass for civic

journalism.”

**Respondent 7:** When answering a question about public journalism, the participant’s response began... “Yeah, I think citizen journalism or whatever you want to call it, local, that sort of niche reporting...”

**Respondent 8:** “I have no clue what you mean by public journalism because I’m thinking that traditional journalism is a public service. To me, traditional journalism encompasses public journalism and civic journalism. We are in the business to provide coverage to our communities and that’s civic and public and all of that.” (Note: respondent indicates a difference between public and civic journalism when they are actually the same thing)

**Respondent 9:** “Can you give me an example of who performs public journalism? To me, maybe public journalism would be more along the lines of Citizens.org or PublicCitizens.org. That’s what I think of when I think of public journalism. I think maybe a better way of defining it may be advocacy journalism.”

***Sub-Theme 1: Public journalism as unmediated or citizen journalism.***

Over half of the respondents believed public journalism to be in some way, a form of citizen journalism or unmediated journalism. In some instances, a general description and definition was provided for clarification and there was still a tendency to relate the public model of journalism to untrained people producing content for dissemination.

**Differentiation:** Respondents 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 indicate that public journalism is unmediated or is a form of citizen journalism.

Respondents 1, 2, 4, and 8 did not intermingle public and citizen journalism. They also did not consider public journalism an unmediated practice.

**Respondent 1:** She did not blend public journalism with citizen journalism. She did not deem public journalism an unmediated practice.

**Respondent 2:** He did not mistake public journalism for citizen journalism. He did not appraise public journalism as unmediated.

**Respondent 3:** After being explained that the public journalism model encourages citizen engagement, participant had this response: “Yeah, I have heard of citizen journalism, I’m not a big fan to be perfectly honest.” He asserted that people who blog and offer commentary, whether via a newspaper or website, can potentially cause some major problems. He also mentioned comments that are posted online by anonymous users as being a complication as well. “The online comments of them, in many cases, there are no restrictions at all.” He said that some news organizations have mandated that anonymity be eliminated. Participant conveyed that he considered public journalism as citizen journalism with this specific comment: “There is an increase in public journalism, citizen journalism, whatever you want to call it. I have extremely mixed feelings about citizen journalism and citizen participation on news organizations websites and letters to the editor.”

**Respondent 4:** She did not display any connection between public journalism and citizen journalism. She did not indicate that public journalism is unmediated in any way.

**Respondent 5:** She views civic journalism as unmediated. “It scares me to tell you the truth. Anybody out there can be published in a heartbeat. There’s no one to filter the facts back and verify the information. It just absolutely boggles my mind.”

**Respondent 6:** He alluded that civic journalism is very similar to citizen journalism by providing examples of places outside of the United States that were experiencing turmoil where locals would be able to provide the most accurate perspective in terms of what was

really going on. “When those Iranian students went through their uprisings, nobody ever bothered going to the state version of what was happening. If you wanted to get a real feel for what was happening in the streets, you went to the student reporters, the locals, not even reporters, just people who were providing their own observations on the events around them.” He also cited the Civil War era where people would write and send off their own personal accounts of what they saw happening during the war. These accounts would end up becoming big stories in the newspapers back then. He explains that the idea of relying on local versions first, before a professional reporter’s version of a story is not new.

**Respondent 7:** After calling public journalism citizen journalism or “niche reporting,” participant expresses that soon people will not have to decide whether or not public journalism is important. “It will become self-evident because people will self-report.” This comment indicates that participant considers public journalism as citizen journalism. She also cautioned that trained journalists need to be a step ahead of the citizen journalism game. “Anybody can share information. That doesn’t make you a journalist.”

**Respondent 8:** She did not indicate a connection between public journalism and citizen journalism. She did not suggest that public journalism is unmediated.

**Respondent 9:** She described public journalism as a citizen watchdog group. “Like regular people doing journalism without training?”

***Sub-Theme 2: Seeing Public Journalism as having no difference from the Traditional Model of Journalism.***

The following respondents viewed public journalism as doing the same thing traditional journalism does.

**Respondent 5:** She indicates that there is no difference between the two types of journalism.

“Public journalism is doing the same kinds of things traditional journalism is doing. I don’t see a lot of differentiation there. I see them as doing the same thing.” She goes on to suggest that while the two are doing the same thing, perhaps public journalism is doing it with a more in-depth approach and ‘with a slant to it’ than its traditional counterpart.

**Respondent 8:** “I don’t see much distinction between the two models of journalism, unless you are talking about entertainment journalism, then that’s different. I think traditional journalism encompasses public journalism and civic journalism. The thing is that traditional journalism can encompass so much.”

**Respondent 9:** “How does public journalism differ from traditional journalism, because that’s what we do too.” It’s just a different mode of telling a story, but I don’t see it departing from the traditional mode of journalism at all. I really don’t understand the difference.”

### **Summary of Theme three**

Theme three is very complex because of the wide variety of meanings given to the term public journalism. There were several concepts that emerged from within this theme that demonstrate the complication that accompanies the term and its properties. Two-thirds of respondents requested clarification on the term itself. Over half of respondents think public journalism is a form of unmediated, citizen journalism. They associated the term with people just randomly producing content with no formal journalism training, hence the evolution of sub-theme one. For a small number of respondents there appears to be apprehension about unmediated or citizen journalism as well. They see this type of journalism as unfiltered and a threat to the integrity of the profession.

Theme three manifested another compelling sub-theme that did not garner as much support as sub-theme one; however, it is significant in its own right. Sub-theme two, *Seeing*

*Public Journalism as Having no Difference from the Traditional Model of Journalism*, is fascinating because it places these two models together and for one-third of respondents, there is no distinction between the two. This signifies a lack of familiarity with the model of civic journalism, but it also denotes the idea that these models and their practices are so similar to these particular respondents that distinguishing between the two is not an option.

#### **Theme 4: Encouraging political deliberation and participation**

A great deal of literature on public journalism emphasizes aspects of the model that encourage political deliberation and participation. Data from this research was isolated to examine the feelings respondents relate to journalism and its role in promoting political involvement. The findings indicate some ambivalence when it comes to this practice, but the majority found support for the relationship.

**Differentiation:** Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 all feel that journalism is intricately connected to the practice of encouraging political participation and deliberation.

Respondent 6 adamantly disagrees with the idea of a journalist taking this role.

Respondent 8 expresses ambivalence with the association, but ultimately pronounces that it should be a function of journalism.

The following elicitations reveal respondents impressions related to the theme:

**Respondent 1:** “I think journalism very clearly promotes political involvement.” She suggests this practice is done because journalists think people welcome it and they need to know and care about politics. She believes that encouraging political participation and deliberation is a goal of journalism.

**Respondent 2:** He agrees that journalism should play a role in encouraging political



involvement. “Political engagement is the most immediate way that people can try to ensure that their community is what they want it to be. It’s a good goal of journalism to encourage this.” He maintains that the more engaged people are, the more likely they are going to want to read the newspaper. This, he claims, is a self-preservation tool for journalism. It can help to ensure the longevity of the media operation.

**Respondent 3:** He asserts that promoting political participation is acceptable as long as it’s presented in the editorial section of the paper. “If you run an editorial encouraging people to get out and vote that’s fine, but it’s not appropriate in the news section.” He says newspapers often endorse political candidates and that it is okay for them to make recommendations or suggestions on the editorial pages. When asked about newspaper-sponsored forums or roundtable discussions, he said newspaper-sponsored political events are also okay as long as they are giving multiple candidates a chance to be heard. “A newspaper can be involved in those forums as long as they are a facilitator or presenter and they don’t take a role in endorsing a candidate at a public event.”

**Respondent 4:** “Political participation should be our goal as journalists. We should inform people about everything. It’s just informing people to the extent that they would want to make a decision for themselves.” She argues that getting people more involved in politics is not the same as pushing for change. “You should allow the public to see what’s going on around them so that they decide to take it upon themselves to get more politically involved, because politics affects everything they do.” She claims that showing them how politics are intricately connected to their daily lives is one of the jobs of journalism. The way to do it is through reporting. She does not believe that roundtable discussions or political forums are techniques that work well. “If you are holding these forums it’s great for intellectualism, but

it's not going to get the average guy on the street to get involved.”

**Respondent 5:** She declares promoting political participation and deliberation is a very valuable function of journalism. Journalists help give people the information that lets them know what their rights are and how they can participate. “Encouraging participation, advertising when and how the public is supposed to participate, helping to promote venues where people can get the information they need, oh absolutely.” She feels town hall meetings are placed for demonstration, but thinks forums that encourage people to engage in civil discourse and allow people to get to know political candidate are pretty valuable. “News organizations they do sponsor debates and these kinds of things, but to me it's kind of outside the realm of actual reporting.”

**Respondent 6:** He does not believe that journalism should play a role in the encouragement of political participation or deliberation. “It's just good business sense not to get too preachy with people because inevitably you will turn them off.” He does not like when reporters attempt to tell readers what to think or what to do. Maintains the most important thing a journalist can do as a storyteller is bring attention to an issue, provide facts, and sometimes this will prompt people to become more politically involved. “Maybe they join a campaign or start to think differently about a particular politician than they had before.” He cites some publications that do okay simply attracting a more narrow audience using a specific political agenda. “That's fine if they want to do that, but as far as I can tell, it's better to attempt to appeal to the widest audience, not the most narrow one.” He does not exhibit much faith in public journalism techniques such as polling or focus groups. “Polling is supposed to have some level of meaning. Like 50% of Americans believe polls are nonsense.”

**Respondent 7:** She believes that encouraging political involvement through journalism is a

given. She cautions that journalists need to be careful about steering people into one political arena or the other. “You want to encourage the public to engage in civil discourse and to facilitate change.” She says people will have the best opportunity to do this while they are viewing media content that provides mobilizing information they can use to make decisions in terms of how to act. Respondent does not think techniques such as roundtable discussions or town hall meetings are usually effective. She notes that roundtable discussions can be useful if they are discussing something purposeful that the public will care about.

**Respondent 8:** She expressed ambivalence when discussing the notion of journalism and encouragement of political participation to the public. “I don’t know. My knee-jerk reaction is to say yes, it’s our civic duty, but then I ask myself if a newspaper should be involved in encouraging political participation.” She upholds that we are all citizens and we should all participate, but was unable to offer an explanation as to why a news organization should become involved in this type of encouragement. “I think they should, I just can’t tell you why. I just can’t justify it at all.” In terms of the civic journalistic techniques of polls, town hall meetings, roundtable discussions and forums, she said they all “feel a little gimmicky.”

**Respondent 9:** She strongly agrees that journalism should encourage political participation and deliberation among members of the public. “Our government is based on public participation.” She cites making people aware of the issues can prompt them to action. “I think it’s just a matter of making people aware.” In terms of forums and other events, she does not really think the practice represents an accurate sampling. “I think if you’re having events, you are always going to draw people who have a vested interest in the topic that you are going to be discussing.” She indicated that polling, out of all of the public journalistic techniques, would possibly work in some situations. She implied roundtable discussions were

the best method because they represent as many viewpoints as possible.

#### **Summary of Theme four**

Over two-thirds of respondents feel that it is in fact the role of journalism to encourage political deliberation and participation. Theme four did not develop any strong sub-themes, but it did display a strong support for journalists promoting political involvement. The type of promotion however, appears to be limited to taking a facilitative role and informing the public about ways to participate and their rights as citizens. Nearly every respondent expressed the importance of not injecting political bias into the encouragement and facilitative process. The overall feeling conveyed was that encouraging the public to engage in discourse and participate in the public sphere is fine, as long as they are not being persuaded to go in a certain direction.

Public journalism techniques such as roundtable discussions, open forums, polling, and focus groups did not amass much support from the sample. A few respondents suggest that roundtable discussions could have a place in journalism, but for the most part, these techniques were dismissed or thought of as minimally useful.

This theme is connected to Theme one, *Objectivity* because of the significant support given to the notion of remaining objective while encouraging political deliberation and participation.

#### **Theme 5: Dedication to traditional journalism**

Throughout the process of data cleaning, a concept has emerged several times and has proved central to this research. While many respondents indicated some openness to the ideas and techniques associated with public journalism, most were not willing to completely depart

from the traditional tenets of journalism. In fact, many responses signaled a desire to honor and preserve the practices associated with traditional journalism. Some participants demonstrated a willingness to combine both models of journalism, but would not abandon their traditional journalistic values while doing so. The subsequent data concentrations exemplify this theme:

**Respondent 1:** She claims it is important to have a strong foundation in traditional journalism before embarking on any public journalistic endeavor. “If you are well grounded in the goals and obligations of a traditional journalist, you can depart from those safely. A traditional journalist who engages in public journalism can do so well because that journalist understands why we do this job and why someone needs to do it. I think if we start at public journalism, we will depart into rampant subjectivity.” She describes traditional journalism as something that can be dry and boring but that we need it. She says a hybrid of the two models would produce positive effects but that reporters should have the strongest possible foundation in traditional journalism before they try public journalism. She said it’s okay to let a very “experienced, strong traditional reporter” to branch out into public journalism. She also said that there are journalists who will never be great in terms of the traditional model, but they may still be great reporters. “I think there are just people that you allow to do public journalism.” She thinks that the two models can be combined successfully, but that the traditional foundation is mandatory.

**Respondent 2:** He believes that the traditional model can be destructive because it does not recognize that things have changed. “I think that traditional journalism has to give up its ivory tower mentality.” He feels that public journalism and traditional journalism can be compatible in the long run if the traditional model is willing to compromise. “Media

operations can cling to an old mindset but I just don't think it's going to work. The savvier readers have come to expect that they are going to have a voice in the process and they are not passive recipients of the news anymore."

**Respondent 3:** "I'm old-school enough to know the benefits of the traditional model that in many ways has worked for a long time, for many generations and continues to be the best way." When considering a hybrid of the two models, he expresses some optimism. "I think it would be a really nice way of combining modern technology with old-school journalism. They are not mutually exclusive. You can have experience in one and succeed in the other." He stresses the importance of utilizing the skills that are taught through the traditional model saying that public journalists would do best if they incorporate what they learned from the traditional foundation. "Use the best of their abilities and combine that with the basic foundation from traditional journalism and they will be a better journalist overall, there is no question about it."

**Respondent 4:** "You have to tone down how much civic journalism you feed to people and understand that it's hard to take on all of everyone else's troubles. Giving them the traditional stuff is very, very important." She later explains that none model cannot be deemed better than the other. It is up to the public to decide what is important. "You can't just say civic journalism is the most important thing so let's throw it at people until they get sick of it."

**Respondent 5:** "It's my way of thinking is no matter what platform, it goes back to the basic traditional values." She asserts balanced journalism is key no matter what model journalism is being engaged. "That should be the basis for all types of journalism no matter what."

**Respondent 6:** "I would try to apply as much of the traditional model as possible. This

seems like a foreign concept to some of the practitioners of civic journalism.” He defends the basic conventions of traditional journalism, citing they are reasonable. “Out of all the issues of civic journalism that bother me the most, is the sloppiness with sources.” He explains that if civic journalism has a chance at survival, it has to adopt the traditional approach as part of how it conducts journalism. “I would like to think that traditional journalism is going to save the media; it’s in a bad situation right now and I’m not sure what’s going to happen.”

**Respondent 7:** “The basic tenets of traditional journalism should remain unchanged.” She recognized that sometimes a story may benefit from the civic approach, but that a lot of the time a journalist needs to dig deeper, beyond local, citizen sources. She also expressed concern that the traditional custom of a reporter working a beat is becoming less prevalent. “We are losing the journalist’s ability to have a beat. We have got to figure out a way to go back and keep that back in our community.”

**Respondent 8:** She affirms the foundation of journalism should be the traditional model with some departure to the public model when management deems it appropriate. She believes journalists should be initially trained in the rational AP model of journalism. “I think it’s difficult for the public to see an entry-level journalist in the civic role as well as the traditional role because it’s difficult for a single person to play both roles credibly.” She supports the idea of a hybrid model as long as the traditional model is dominant. “I think you have to use the traditional model, or you are not going to get the information, you know.” She advances that all public journalism projects need to come from management. She does not believe it is the individual journalists’ role to initiate civic journalism projects or stories. “When you start getting into public or civic journalism, management always needs to be involved, because it’s always institutional. Management needs to be on board and behind

whatever good you are trying to do.”

**Respondent 9:** Believes a hybrid model would produce both positive and negative effects, but that the positive would end up outweighing the negative.

***Sub-Theme 1: Display of traditional sourcing practices, source selection and representation.***

The following data selections reveal the patterns that have emerged in terms of sourcing:

**Respondent 1:** She indicates she selects sources that are the experts on the story. She contends that it is helpful to find a recognizable name to help explain something. “You choose sources who are either experts or recognizable to gain the trust of your reader.” She claims that a reporter will use citizen sources in a hyper local story or a feature, but not as much in news stories that lend themselves to “traditionally credible” sources. “I’ve seen citizen sources used in traditional news stories, but the risk there is that readers are still going to wonder where those sources came from.”

**Respondent 2:** He selects his sources in traditional ways, noting that he looks for someone who is at the center of a conflict or is pushing a particular agenda. “I start at the center with the people who are most directly involved and then work outward towards people who are less involved but have useful perspectives.” He maintains that it is difficult to provide representation from all of the community and calls sourcing an imperfect process.

**Respondent 3:** “We plan in advance. If we are looking for people that we might want to be quoting, we will put something in the paper and ask people to share their experiences on a certain topic. If it’s a story that we don’t have a lot of ready-made sources for, we’ll solicit



them.” He argues it takes a conscious effort to attempt to reflect the community as best as possible. He does not think it is possible to accurately reflect the community as a whole, but says his publication makes efforts to procure diverse sources.

**Respondent 4:** When presented with a story, she tries to find the experts related to the topic. “Always get the public involved and always get the experts so you have a nice balance.” She claims it is a challenge to represent everyone and attempting to do so can cause a journalist to become overly paranoid that they are not representing all sides. “You can’t represent every single perspective.”

**Respondent 5:** “I select my sources according to who is going to give me the best information for the assignment.” She upholds that part of a journalist’s job is to determine which sources have valid points to make and which can be discarded. “Try to make sure that the major voices are heard knowing that eventually all the voices from different angles are going to be heard. It’s pretty impossible to represent all of the community.”

**Respondent 6:** He cites that source selection depends on a person’s social credibility and their past record of trustworthiness when working with other reporters. “The newspaper is supposed to represent everybody and give a voice to the voiceless, right? The reality is they have to pick and choose who gets represented on any given day.” He also attributes the lack of diversity among sources to the lack of resources at many publications. “It’s not a bad ideal to strive to represent everyone. I don’t think they can, though, there just aren’t enough resources. Every newspaper is limited by the number of reporters and scope of coverage they have.”

**Respondent 7:** She contends that source selection depends on each individual story. She tries to find sources that are closest to the story. “I try to find the source closest to the truth.”

She claims accurately representing all members of the community requires a level of commitment and self-awareness. “First person is always best, then try to follow up with an expert.”

**Respondent 8:** She decides what sources are needed to aid in making her story complete. “You just have to brainstorm and find who has something intelligent to say about the topic and who represents that sphere I am trying to complete.” She explains that beat reporters will have their usual, regular sources such as the mayor, city council members, and other governmental officials. She cites the importance of accessibility to the community. “I think it’s important to always keep your ear to the ground and answer your phone so you don’t leave out a portion of the community.”

**Respondent 9:** She attests that it is very challenging to include everyone in terms of source representation, but that trying to avoid using only official sources helps. “We try and mix it up as much as possible.”

### **Summary of Theme five**

The development of Theme five is inherent because of several pieces of data deposited throughout the interview transcripts that allude to the traditional way of practicing journalism. These indicators appeared repeatedly, demonstrating a profound loyalty to the traditional conventions of journalism. All except two respondents reveal their commitment to the principles of traditional journalism. The values and ethics that are associated with the foundation of the traditional model appear to be intrinsically rooted in the professional philosophies of the majority of the sample. Departing from this foundation entirely does not appear to be a viable option for these respondents.

Their devotion to the traditional model is also communicated through their use of

traditional source selection. Most of the respondents report they select sources in a traditional manner, using experts and officials as the centerpiece sources in their stories. Some respondents added they do attempt to incorporate non-official, citizen sources at times, but the dominant pattern appears to mirror traditional source selection. Two respondents indicate discomfort with using too many citizen sources because they think it will damage credibility. The traditional approach to sourcing seems to be engrained in the sourcing practices of a majority of the sample.

### **Discussion**

It is important as a researcher to not take sides and advocate for one model of journalism or the other, but to investigate thoroughly both models to be able to better assess the strengths and weaknesses they possess. Highlighting the key propositions present in the data as well as their connection to the literature review will help explain the emergent theories related to the study.

In this study, the sample intensely supported traditional aspects of journalism such as objectivity and conventional source selection. These items appear to be deeply rooted in the practices of these journalists. These are values that are intrinsically tied to the practice of journalism. St. John (2007) argued that maintaining objectivity can distance journalists from their audiences because of their detachment. Respondents from the study could not disagree more. Accuracy, objectivity, and fairness are given a lot of weight by the sample. The value of objectivity in particular does not seem to be open to interpretation and flexibility.

The most compelling finding of this research was the confusion associated with the

term public journalism. Given the sample consisted of professional journalists or former journalists, this finding was surprising. Lack of clarity and understanding with the term public journalism indicates that the preferred and understood model is the traditional one, at least for this group of respondents. Nip (2008) contends that opponents as well as supporters of public journalism have not been able to establish what defines the model and its practices. This same problem presented itself several times in the data. There was never a clear, concise working definition affiliated with public journalism. The confusion continued to spread as the study progressed. It was described as a type of public service journalism, advocacy journalism, all the way to unmediated, unfiltered, dangerous journalism. The perceptions and meanings of the model were all over the board, signaling that perhaps this “model” of journalism isn’t really a model after all. Maybe it is merely a conglomerate of ideas that eventually inherited a label within a portion of the journalism community. Voakes (1999) argues that because public journalism does not have an explicit definition, it presents issues in terms of the value and understanding of the model. He claims that because it is lacking a decisive definition, public journalism is more vulnerable to criticism. Voakes’ idea makes sense because when something (public journalism) is being considered an actual “model” of journalism and people are having a great deal of difficulty pinning down what it even means, there is a problem. The model of public journalism cannot be expected to be adopted in newsrooms everywhere if its definition is ambiguous. Another reason for the lack of clarity with the term could be due to the movement of public journalism being fairly obscure. If it was more well known, an understanding and working definition of the term may evolve.

Public journalism is clearly not the dominant way of practicing journalism. Its ideas mean well and if incorporated into the traditional model of journalism, they could possibly

produce quality content. The ideas put forth in parts of the literature review supporting the principles and practices of public journalism appear to have good intentions; however, after conducting this study, it suffices to say that according to this sample, some of these things may work in addition to traditional journalism, but not alone and not by doing away with the traditional foundation of journalism.

An element of public journalism that could be viable in any form of journalism is the role of encouraging political deliberation and participation. The majority of respondents indicated support for this role. Perry (2003) asserts that the main ambition of public journalism is to pull journalists and the public into the social and political sphere so they are actively involved, not just watching from the sidelines. Arant & Meyer (1998) also suggest that public journalism encourages journalists to prompt members of the public to become active participants in the political process. Perhaps prompting the public to participate in the political process is not just a principle of public journalism. From the data collected for this study, it would point to being a goal of traditional journalism as well. The concept of stimulating and strengthening the public's participatory role in the political process is not an idea endemic to public journalism, but rather an objective that has been implemented by many traditional journalism organizations for years.

Another component of public journalism that may have a chance of survival is the concept of the journalist as a problem solver. Young (2004) argues that public journalism offers solution-based content that benefits audiences because they are presented with solutions to rectify problems, not just a problem with nowhere to turn. Some respondents in this study agreed that journalists can play a role in offering solutions to their audiences. They did, however, draw a line when the problem-solving bordered on activism. Arant and Meyer

(1998) reinforced this notion by explaining that journalists are open to helping people in terms of solving problems, but they are not willing to support a role of public journalism activist. Editors and news directors can use this information to perhaps incorporate more solution-based reporting in their newsrooms. Even if it is simply providing mobilizing information at the end of a story so the public has the necessary tools to act accordingly, that would be beneficial. Nichols et al., (2006) cited that framing stories in a problem-solving fashion enhances citizenship as well as the political process. Framing stories to offer solutions does not mean that journalists are suddenly activists or advocates for a particular cause. What it means is they are willing to take the extra time and put forth the effort to supply their audience with information that is relevant to them. Problem solving can take the form of many things. It does not intend to literally solve the problems of the public, but to act in a facilitative role in order to better the lives of the audience.

In terms of adopting the ideas that public journalism puts forth, the respondents do not appear willing to abandon how they currently practice journalism. As seen in Theme 5, there is devotedness to the traditional way of practicing journalism that cannot be permeated by ideas or practices that may compromise the conventional methods they are accustomed to. Corrigan (1999) suggests that public journalism demands traditional journalists change their way of thinking. The findings in this study do not suggest the journalists are ready or willing to change the way they view journalism. They have a certain way of doing things and that are not likely to be interrupted and altered. Arant and Meyer (1998) found that while journalists sometimes support the values associated with public journalism, they are not inclined to approve of practices that are contrary to traditional journalistic customs. The traditional model of journalism remains in the dominant position throughout the study. There were

incremental departures that illustrated limited support for the roles and practices of public journalism, but overall, the sense of dedication to the traditional was imperative.

While the respondents indicated they are devoted to the majority of the traditional ways of practicing journalism, they also signaled some willingness to incorporate techniques that would be in line with the civic journalism model. Taking on the role of problem-solver was acceptable to half of the sample and therefore it would be beneficial for media professionals to consider experimenting with some problem-solving, solution-focused civic journalistic techniques. Framing stories in a manner that leads audiences to solutions to the presented issues will likely help them to feel empowered and perhaps more inclined to consume future content. This could be an advantageous situation for both news organizations as well as consumers of news.

Media companies can use these data to reinforce the use of traditional journalistic techniques. If they want to be innovative and branch out with different ways of presenting and delivering content, they can make sure they slowly introduce ideas related to public journalism so that their newsrooms have time to adjust and make changes. A gradual experimentation with utilizing civic journalistic techniques will not only limit resistance from employees, it will also determine how audiences feel and things can be adjusted accordingly. The slow introduction of novel public journalism concepts may not be needed for all newsrooms. Some seasoned veterans as well as novice reporters may welcome the change and be open to the idea without resistance. However, much of the literature suggests these types of changes can be contradictory to what the traditionally trained reporter is accustomed to and should be introduced with some discretion. Perhaps replicating a public journalism project using techniques that have been successful for another publication would be an

appropriate way to experiment with public journalism in a usually traditional newsroom. Ultimately, management typically decides what and how a story or series will be written and presented. However, a synthesis of the two models of journalism would most likely be successful when there is cooperation and collaboration from both management as well as reporters.

Theoretically, these data can be used to understand how journalists are loyal to the values of objectivity and fairness but also feel compelled in some ways, to help the public solve problems. There appears to be some disconnect when it comes to deciding which are appropriate or acceptable ways journalists should take when fulfilling problem-solving roles. For some it may be simply giving light to the issue and letting the public discover their own path to a solution. For other journalists, perhaps a more hands-on, facilitative role is what they deem suitable. One of the respondents from this study said that journalists are in the business of solving problems just by uncovering issues and presenting them to readers. This may be true but offering solutions to the public and giving them the tools and opportunities to act is also an important role for a journalist to consider. Taking on an activist role as a journalist can be dangerous and damage the credibility of the reporter as well as the news organization they represent. On the contrary, assuming a facilitative role can aid in connecting the reporter to his or her community. Many of the practices associated with civic journalism encourage forging connections and commitments to the citizens and issues of the community. The reporter can still remain objective, accurate and fair, but they can also periodically let go of the traditional detachment role and really dedicate themselves to the betterment of their communities. This idea of extracting positive principles from both models of journalism and fusing them together is expected to enhance and improve the final product.



This will benefit communities and news organizations alike.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research relied on a small sample of working or retired journalists and editors. While the data collected were detailed in description, future research could perhaps conduct survey research on a much larger sample to better understand journalists' feelings in terms of public and traditional journalistic roles and practices. The sample could also expand to include news directors, journalism educators, graduate students studying journalism, and news producers. A more diffuse sample in terms of journalism training and professional background would also augment the relevance of the data. More than two-thirds of the sample had experience in the newspaper industry and their training was likely similar in some ways. While a portion of the respondents also had experience in other mediums such as television and web journalism, the sample primarily consisted of traditionally trained journalists that have worked in print media.

This study was limited not only due to sample size and lack of heterogeneity among the sample, but also because of the level of experience of the researcher. It provides good foundational information from which to base future research, but does not uncover everything there is to know about the topic. A subsequent study would be more refined and perfected, having learned what to do differently from this inquiry.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research should focus on studies that examine the views of journalism professionals who are very familiar with both public and traditional journalism. This will

eliminate the challenge of explaining repeatedly what defines public journalism. Researchers will then be able to focus their efforts on exploring the effects of both models with respondents who are acquainted with both types of journalism. The research will be able to go much further beyond what was discovered in this study.

Future studies could consider examining select public journalism projects and comparing them with their traditional counterparts. The isolation of a series or even one story could allow for an intricate analysis of what each model produces content-wise. What happens when their respective values and practices make their way to a story series or profile story? These questions could be answered by conducting content analyses of specific journalism projects and then cross-comparing the findings to gain a well-rounded understanding of the two models.

A fusion of civic and traditional journalism could be introduced at the university level to experiment with different ways of presenting content and then subsequently examining the efficacy of various civic and traditional journalistic techniques. Perhaps college students would be more open to the ideas of incorporating practices from both models of journalism than working journalists who maybe already accustomed to a certain way of practicing journalism. Integrating theory and practice in college classrooms will aid in providing a comprehensive approach to experimenting with a synthesized version of the civic and traditional models of journalism.

## Appendix A

Participant Initials \_\_\_\_\_

*Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1104-3805M*

*Received: 06-06-11 Approved: 06-20-11 Expiration: 06-19-12*

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**Department of Journalism and Media Studies**

**TITLE OF STUDY: Comparative and Critical Analysis: The Roles of Traditional and Public Journalism**

**INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Daniel Stout, Kendle Walters**

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-5957**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the roles of both traditional and public journalism.

#### **Participants**

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a working journalist or former journalist.

#### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview and answer questions pertaining to public and traditional journalism practices and effects. The questions will be open-ended and there are no right or wrong answers. The focus of the interview will be to explore the various facets of both models of journalism to compare and contrast their strengths and weaknesses.

The interview will be audiotaped and a separate signature line for consent to be audiotaped will be provided for that purpose.

### **Benefits of Participation**

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to discover more information regarding the practices and effects of traditional and public journalism.

### **Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may feel personally uncomfortable answering certain questions and can request at any time to opt out of questions that you are not prepared to answer.

### **Cost /Compensation**

There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 30 to 60 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

### **TITLE OF STUDY: Comparative and Critical Analysis: The Roles of Traditional and Public Journalism**

Participant Initials \_\_\_\_\_

*Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1104-3805M*

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### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Stout at **895-5957** or **Kendle Walters at 581-7000**. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at**

**702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 5 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be discarded.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age.

A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

**Additional Consent for Audiotaping of Interview:**

*Date:*

Signature of Participant

Participant Name (Please Print)

## Appendix B

Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review

Approval Notice

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: June 20, 2011

TO: Dr. Daniel Stout, Journalism and Media Studies

FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action by

Protocol Title: Comparative and Critical Analysis: The Roles of Traditional and Public Journalism

Protocol #: 1104-3805M

Expiration Date: June 19, 2012

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires June 19, 2012. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be any change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a Modification Form through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu) or call 895-2794.

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VITA

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Kendle Walters

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, 2009  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Thesis Title: Comparative and Critical Analysis: The Roles of Traditional and Public  
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Thesis Examination Committee:

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Committee Member, Dr. Lawrence Mullen, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Stephen Bates, J.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Tara Emmers-Sommer, Ph.D.

