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Community Journalists and Personal Relationships with Sources and Community Organizations

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ABSTRACT

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Community journalists, most of whom work and live in small towns, are likely to create personal relationships with sources and local organizations because of their proximity and involvement in the community. Such relationships may raise ethical questions that explore how journalists manage personal ties in the community. Using a grounded theory approach, the researcher analyzed 15 qualitative, in-depth interviews, this research examined ways in which journalists in six Western communities weigh their personal relationships against traditional journalism norms such as objectivity and detachment. Analysis of these interviews found community journalists fear conflicts of interest, and many of the interview subjects said that if they know a source personally or are a member of an organization, they often try to recuse themselves from coverage of a story. The research also explored ways in which the community journalists take advantage of their community involvement, especially as it pertains to gathering information and developing sources. Respondents were asked how they suggested a reporter balance membership in the local dominant faith with coverage of church issues. The community journalists who were interviewed mostly did not see a conflict between membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and coverage of church issues. Analysis also showed that the editors had few policies governing community involvement, instead relying on reporters' personal judgment and counsel from leadership—while examining each case individually based on its prominence. Finally, this study attempted to explore the differences in community involvement between smaller and larger community newspapers. However, the research suggests that other causes, such as demographics, roots and ties to the community, leadership, and formal training, may play an equal role in encouraging involvement.

Keywords: community journalism, ethics, relationships, sources, community groups, LDS Church, political activity

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the media industry has begun to struggle during the time of its greatest conglomeration. Since the 1980s, major media outlets have been consolidated by a handful of corporations. Nearly 30 years ago, most major sources of news and entertainment in the United States were owned by a small group of about 50 corporations (Bagdikian, 1990). Likewise, there has been an ever-increasing level of distrust and animosity toward the media from the public (Fallows, 1996). Some have even speculated that conglomeration driven by profit seekers has caused the media to ignore its responsibility to serve the public good (McChesney, 1999). The result consists of media that are impersonal, bland, and homogenized, and that suppress ideas while removing control of local editors in favor of corporate bureaucracy—meaning decisions are often made by people who do not even live in a community (Bagdikian, 1990).

The impersonal nature of major media outlets is not all driven by conglomeration. Objectivity and detachment have been staples of the media industry since the early 1900s (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). This objectivity is evident in a reporters "independence from those they cover" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 118) and is a key focus in the training of current and future journalists.

However, even as major media outlets continue to converge, the majority of newspapers in the United States still fill a community niche (Lauterer, 2006; Smith 2008). Community journalism is often used as a moniker for small, regional publications that focus almost exclusively on local news (Byerly, 1961; Lauterer, 2006). Many of these newspapers employ a more personal style that includes all members of the community rather than focusing coverage on individuals of financial or political prominence, while focusing on topics of community interest instead of national relevance (Lauterer, 2006). However, because there are other, non-

geographic definitions of the word community (Tönnies, 1887/1963; Delanty, 2003), perhaps there are other forms of community publications, such as those targeting readers in specific religious or ethnic groups (see Lauterer, 2006; Meadows, 2009; Ojo, 2006).

Even using the traditional geographic definition of community journalism, less than 3 percent of American publications would be considered major metropolitan news sources (Lauterer, 2006; Smith, 2008). Yet, until recently, few researchers have invested time and energy into studying community publications, preferring instead to study larger, more prominent newspapers such as *The New York Times* (Smith, 2008).

Because a large portion of American newspapers has been ignored by academic research, said papers are ripe for study. The field of community journalism is growing and can now boast the recent formation of an online, peer-reviewed journal and an interest group devoted to community journalism in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. However, as most of the academic research in this area is relatively new, the dearth of relevant research offers an opportunity to explore myriad topics in the field of community news. This paper attempted to identify ways in which community journalists interact with sources, many of whom they know on a personal level. The paper will explore how community publications maintain or ignore traditional journalistic values that call for objectivity and detachment.

Using qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews consisting of planned and emergent follow-up questions, this study used Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify the relationships that community journalists develop and maintain with sources, readers, and community organizations. Although traditional journalistic objectivity calls for the aforementioned independence from sources and subjects (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007), that is perhaps difficult for journalists working on a hyperlocal level in smaller towns where a journalist

is likely to have personal relationships with those whom they cover. This study used Grounded Theory through a qualitative constant comparative analysis in order to discover patterns between small weekly and larger daily community newspapers in how they interact with sources in the community.

Literature Review

This section will explore research that has been done on community journalism. First, it will attempt to define community. Then it will explore traditional media models, public journalism, an attempt to create a journalism that would push readers to become more involved in their community, and the basic definition of community journalism. Finally, it will explore the research that has been done in the direction of community journalism, especially concerning the style of reporting involved in community journalism and its ethics and ability to set the community agenda.

Community and *Gemeinschaft*

In order to understand community journalism, one must first seek to define community. Community is often viewed as a geographical construct, but modern sociologists have often extended this definition beyond typical geographic connotations. Community is an experience or state in which an individual is a part of a something, a "particular mode of imagining and experiencing belonging," (Delanty, 2003, p. 26). It is a "symbol and aspiration" (Brint, 2001, p. 1) of all desirable facets of human connectivity that exhibits a "sense of familiarity and safety" (p. 1).

While some scholars add ethnic and religious groups to their definitions of community, some scholars argue that these communities are nothing more than imagined constructs. Said scholars argue that nations or large ethnic groups can not possibly fit the definition of a

community because such groups are far too large for individuals within the grouping to interact with each other enough to allow a sense of community to grow (Anderson, 1991). "True communities of place are invariably relatively small," writes Delanty (2003).

However, community can be seen as shared ideals that grow common bonds. One of the seminal sociological scholars of community, Tönnies (1887/1963), helped define societal norms by separating modes of life into categories. The first he named *Gemeinschaft*, German for "community" (Oxford-Duden, 1997). The second he coined *Gesellschaft,* for "society" (Oxford-Duden, 1997).

Gemeinschaft is a system of "organic" and "intimate" relationships (Tönnies 1887/1963, p. 33). The organic nature of *Gemeinschaft* often results in longstanding relationships that develop over time and whose intimacy allows bonds to grow through common interests and beliefs (Tönnies, 1887/1963). *Gesellschaft*, however, is forced, temporary, and "superficial" (p. 35). In many cases *Gesellschaft* could simply be seen as a natural modernization of community from "childhood" to "maturity" (Brint, 2001, p. 2).

Brint (2001) states Tönnies' greatest contribution to the argument between each lifestyle was that he did not seem to favor one or the other. However, there are inherent weaknesses to Tönnies' theory, Brint writes:

> The obvious difficulty with this approach is that these qualities do not necessarily line up together on one side of a conceptual divide. Common ways of life do not necessarily imply common beliefs. Small numbers of people do not necessarily imply common ways of life. Continuous relations do not necessarily imply emotional bonds. (p. 3).

Using Tönnies' definitions, *Gemeinschaft* could be manifested in mass media by small, rural publications that reach out and seek to build ties to their communities, or in religious

publications that seek to build community ideals of a faith-based community (Johnson & Randle, 2011).

Although few studies have been done concerning Tönnies ' idea of *Gemeinschaft* as it relates to media, applying *Gemeinschaft* to the idea of community journalism can illustrate why many small newspapers reach the community on a much more intimate and personal level, allowing citizens to connect with the needs of the community—and with each other.

Community news is far more collectivistic than a traditional urban media outlet. It often promotes a town's values—or at least conforms to them. Community media focus on rural, agrarian topics, such as agricultural news (Kennedy, 1974). They promote the community by featuring local news, events, and issues (Lauterer, 2006). Relationships with sources and readers often grow over long periods of time because with the nature of a small town, many people either live in an area or stay in leadership positions for a long time. Journalists in this situation can also become local icons as they earn the trust of their consumers (Smith, 2008).

According to Tönnies (1887/1963), *Gemeinschaft* begins with family relationships but extends to neighborhoods and other forms of geographical communities. Tönnies notes geographical manifestations of *Gemeinschaft* are common even if one leaves an area—as long as that person still connects with the area through rituals and memory.

Although community newspapers fit many characteristics of *Gemeinschaft*—intimate reporting style, organic evolution of relationships with sources and readers, identification with traditions and geography of locality—there are perhaps other areas where the model does not strictly fit a *Gemeinschaft* model. According to Tönnies (1887/1963), *Gemeinschaft* is a private aspect of life. The act of broadcasting information—even positive news—to the general public would contradict the private facet of *Gemeinschaft*. Although community journalists may be

concerned about the people they cover and the community, they still have an obligation to print the truth—which is the first principle of journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007).

Traditional Media Models

During the height of the Cold War, a group of researchers set out to define the nature of most of the world's media. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) published a groundbreaking book in which the authors describe "Four Theories of the Press." Siebert et al. argued that governments and their ruling style affect how media operate in various countries. These four theories were "authoritarian," "libertarian," "social responsibility," and the "Soviet communist" models of communication (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 7). Each of these models was derived from not only a form of government, but also from cultures of countries and specific time periods. According to Downing (2007), Siebert et al.'s four theories are normative: They describe more how media should be in a certain political system, not precisely how they are in reality.

For example, Siebert et al.'s authoritarian model arose from a study of European monarchies. In this model the monarch is in ultimate control of the media and all voices answer to him or her. Media publish by leave of the monarch and as such do not openly question the ruler's policies—but promote the monarch's agenda (Siebert et al., 1956).

Similarly, under the Soviet-communist model, the media acted as a propaganda system that did not criticize the party—instead actively promoting the Soviet socialist model (Siebert et al., 1956).

Siebert et al. (1956) say the libertarian model, as popularized in the late 17th century, featured the writings of many respected scholars such as Milton, Locke, and Mill. Under this philosophy, the media did not serve by the leave of the king but was rather a protection to the people in discovering the truth in all things and protecting citizens' rights (Siebert et al., 1956).

The social responsibility model emerged in the early 20th Century, especially in the United States. Proponents of this model profess an almost sacred responsibility of the media to inform the public of vital issues (Siebert et al. 1956). Proponents of this model profess an almost sacred responsibility of the media to inform the public of vital issues (Siebert et al., 1956). However, it was not widely popularized until the Commission on Freedom of the Press of 1947—also known as the Hutchins Commission (McIntire, 1987; Pickard, 2010). As McIntire (1987) writes, the commission saw that "the widespread exchange of ideas and information is essential to the education of citizens in a democracy, individuals have not just a right, but a duty to express their opinions as part of that exchange" (p. 144). Pickard (2010) notes that the commission was responsible for creating the "normative foundations for the modern press system" (p. 392).

The social responsibility theory of the media was the beginning of the movement toward objective, detached media (Rosenstiel & Kovach, 2007). Objectivity has recently been assailed as a lofty and unreachable goal because a journalist's report will always be tainted by his or her personal biases:

> The standard version of 'objectivity' holds that it was created to end nineteenth-century sensationalism. To a large extent it did, and that alone made it appealing to serious journalists . . . But the new doctrine was not truly objective. Different individuals writing about the same scene never produce precisely the same account. And the way 'objectivity' was applied exacted high cost from journalism and from public policy. With all its technical advantages, 'objectivity' contradicted the essentially subjective nature of journalism. Every basic step in the journalistic process involves a value-laden decision (Bagdikian, 1990, p. 179).

Yet Rosenstiel and Kovach (2007) argue such critics fail to comprehend the true definition of journalistic objectivity: “In this original understanding of objectivity, neutrality is not a fundamental principle of journalism. It is merely a voice, or device, to persuade the audience of one’s accuracy or fairness” (Rosenstiel & Kovach, 2007, p. 83).

McQuail (2010) notes that the four theories of the press are somewhat outdated and it is not always easy to completely identify to which model a media system belongs because some of the theories overlap. For Downing (2007), the most egregious sin of Siebert et al.’s theories is that they presume that western media models can be applied to those of other cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

McQuail (1984) suggested another model that could account for media that engages in community building, which he calls “democratic-participant theory” (p. 96). Here, the consumer is the most important person taking part in communication (McQuail, 1984). As the name of the theory suggests, democratic-participant theory requires that any message must help the consumer to engage in the democratic process—instead of shutting him or her out of the conversation. The media that fit this theory are far more likely to be personally connected to consumers and their everyday activities to the point that “public participation and a democratic process were central to their operation” (Downing, 2007, p. 25). According to McQuail, the democratic-participant model conflicts with the government-owned and controlled media of the Soviet system, but also decries the “uniform, centralized, high cost, highly professionalized” media of the Western social responsibility model (p. 1984, p. 97). Downing (2007) argues the model applies to most small media and involves a more personal approach that involves the audience, minorities, interactivity, and the needs of the community. This more personal approach is often tied to

community media (see Byerly, 1961; Kennedy, 1974, Lauterer, 2006) but has begun to creep into metropolitan publications as well (Weldon, 2008).

Public Journalism

An experiment among journalists in the 1990s tried to employ a more democratic-participant model. Rosen (1996) called the movement "public journalism," in which journalists realized that the impersonal nature of their craft had inherent issues.

Public journalism proponents were not the only critics to claim that journalism, even as it subscribed to social responsibility theory, was ignoring the needs of its consumers. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) note that a key tenet of journalism should be a reporter's "independence from those they cover" (p. 118). That ideal independence also extends to advertising and ownership control over editorial content, which, while noble, has not yet been achieved (McChesney, 1999).

According to Rosen (1996), the primary focus of public journalism is to be "a willing sponsor of public talk" (p. 6). The model recognizes that journalists are also citizens who should try to "improve democracy" (p. 178) by involving the community, not only in decisions but also in discourse. Critics of public journalism accused the practice of being veiled activism, stating that a journalist's job was to report, not influence (Rosen, 1996).

Community Journalism

Community journalism is similar to public journalism in its desire to connect more with readers on a personal level. "Small is beautiful," is how Jock Lauterer of the University of North Carolina, a leading voice in teaching community journalism and the author of several books on the subject, describes the practice (2006, p. 1). The first—and most accepted—criterion in defining community media deals with the size of the operation. Many sources agree that community publications should be small (Lauterer, 2006; Byerly, 1961). Early descriptions

stated that community newspapers were mostly weeklies with a circulation of less than 10,000 (Byerly, 1961). However, Lauterer (2006) recently has said that many daily papers with circulations as many as 50,000 readers can be considered community media.

However, community journalism is not simply a geographical idea (Reader, 2012)—especially with the changing landscape of media through technology. Scholars have noted that diaspora has occurred throughout many communities in the world, where ethnic groups leave traditional areas but still cling to senses of community in their new homelands (Kotkin, 1992). These communities often form their own media systems to serve their minority interests (Meadows, 2009; Ojo, 2006).

Historically, many of the community, minority-themed publications have been foreign-language or ethnic newspapers. For example, in the mid-1850s, the city of San Francisco saw the creation of a Chinese-language newspaper (Yin, 2009). *Kim Shan Jit San Luk* was a twice-per week publication and covered issues both in the United States and in China to allow immigrants to inform the growing number of Chinese immigrants in California (Yin, 2009). According to Yin, *Kim Shan Jit San Luk* would be the first of many Chinese-language newspapers in the United States: "A study shows that by the turn of the twentieth century, San Francisco alone had at least seven different Chinese newspapers and periodicals" (p. 54).

Similarly, the Midwest of the 1800s saw large numbers of foreign-language newspapers printed by diaspora communities, such as German immigrants in Cincinnati (Best, 2004). According to Best, in the 19th Century, hundreds of German-language newspapers or periodicals were printed for immigrants in the Cincinnati area. German-language newspapers allowed immigrants to continue to use the language and to "share their experiences, express a sense of

identity, report on events occurring in Germany, and announce community news and events" (Best, 2004, p. 32).

Many community newspapers have also historically served in late 19th-Century boosterism efforts, often coinciding with other state-run campaigns to advertise their communities to potential residents, such as the work done by B. B. Paddock with the weekly Forth Worth newspaper in the late 1800s (Bennett, 2008). Likewise, the *Dallas Morning News* served to actively promote Dallas until they were able to "make their city preeminent in the West" (Bennett, 2008, p. 33). During this period, city managers and planners often used community newspapers to gather local support for community projects (Anderson, 2011).

Today, many of the aforementioned media systems are formed through online social media sources, such as discussion boards (Mano & Williams, 2008). Others can be found in traditional print publications (Lewis, 2008).

Meadows (2009) found that consumers of Aboriginal Australians bonded differently with community broadcasting outlets than with traditional mainstream Australian media because of a more personal approach. A study of black publications in French Canada showed members of the community believe they can get something from community journalism that is ignored by mainstream media (Ojo, 2006). For example, Ojo said, black Canadian publications do not conform to stereotypes, such as the perceived belief that many of Canada's media report on the black communities only when there is negative news. The community newspapers spotlight members of the community in a positive light but also report negative news such as crime stories. However, the negative articles are balanced to provide "perspective" (p. 356) by showing that it is not the norm.

Community journalists do not unequivocally share Kovach and Rosentstiel's (2007) ideal detachment and independence from those they cover. As Smith (2008) said, community journalists interact with the community because it is their home, and as such they are invested in its growth and success:

> Community journalists engrain themselves in the community not just by living there but by joining public service groups such as the PTA, volunteering on service projects, and leading efforts to improve local life. Instead of striving to remain objective, distanced reporters, they become advocates for and participants in a community. (Smith, 2008)

Community Journalism Research: A Personal approach

The community journalism model calls for heavy coverage of local government, crime and education news. Despite Barney's (1996) criticism of pandering to the public, according to both Kennedy (1974) and Lauterer (2006) a community focus does not mean a newspaper ignores major issues. It is vital for a small-town newspaper to report on all issues that affect the local population—especially those that appear controversial in nature. However, writers for said publications will use local community members as sources for pertinent information rather than only citing prominent members of society.

Another strength of community journalism is its ability to get the names and faces of local community members, as well as their stories and opinions, into news and feature articles, which can invite a sense of participation (Lauterer, 2006; Kennedy, 1974). Strout (2009) noted that following Hurricane Katrina, a small town in Mississippi, known as Pass Christian, was left devastated and relatively ignored by larger media because of its small size. The members of the community formed their own community newspaper, which not only spotlighted the town's rebuilding efforts, it also helped the public re-identify with their once forsaken sense of

community. Residents themselves became the voice of the rebuilding efforts (Strout, 2009). The publication reached the members of the community perhaps because they understood one another on a communal, personal level. Who would know better about lifting oneself from such sorrow than community members? Could it also be that readers connect with community newspapers on a more personal, *Gemeinschaft* level because they provide a tangible record of a town's continued existence (Lauterer, 2006)?

A community paper should thus pay the most attention to community issues and create conversation to vital ideas that have direct effect on readers' lives. Kennedy (1974), Lauterer (2006), and Byerly (1961) all agree that there is a more personal style to community journalism. Beyond that, articles should heavily feature reports on—and ideas from—average members of the community—not just prominent ones (Lauterer, 2006).

Weldon (2008) notes that the personal, human-interest approach is becoming far more common among even metropolitan newspapers. This form of reporting Weldon dubs "Everyman Journalism." Newspapers are using more "personal experiences, anecdotes, and responses to events considered newsworthy" (Weldon, 2008, p. 3) and have begun shifting many in-depth features to prominent sections of the front page. Perhaps this shows that metropolitan newspapers are learning from community publications on how to reach consumers on a more personal level. However, even with the new push by larger newspapers to include the average members of the community, few metropolitan newspapers can afford to spotlight individuals—as well as a plethora of community issues—the way a small, community newspaper could.

Community Journalism Research: Ethics

Even if community publications are worried about detachment and avoiding conflicts of interest while maintaining objectivity, some research suggests that their ethical dilemmas are

different than those faced by larger newspapers. Reader (2006) noted that not all community journalists are tied to the community, and certainly there are metropolitan journalists who have interests in being a part of a community. However, his 2006 study suggests that larger newspapers are more likely to have strict guidelines for ethical practice than smaller publications. Similarly, newspapers were likely to define conflicts of interest in different terms based on their size. Reader found that many larger newspapers were more concerned with monetary conflicts of interest, while smaller newspaper editors seemed concerned with the conflict of interests of "involvement in community groups" (p. 861).

Northington (1992) notes the reticence of some editors in having employees become involved in community organizations is a fairly recent concept. She writes involvement is not a bad practice for journalists if they examine ethical constructs such as the good the involvement will do for the community and in facing the risks involved, such as finding and avoiding potential conflicts of interest.

For smaller publication editors, conflicts of interest would most likely be managed by making sure that reporters did not cover groups to which they belonged (Reader, 2006). Akhavan-Majid (1995) hypothesized community involvement by editors, especially those at smaller newspapers, would minimize the editors' view of their watchdog role as journalists. However, Akhavan-Majid found that despite the fact that those involved heavily in community organizations were more likely to believe their role was important in shaping public policy, Akhavin-Majid did not find a significant difference in their role as watchdogs against local government and businesses.

Critics of community journalism make many of the same arguments as those who objected to public journalism. To some, community journalism is too close to the community and

resorts to “pandering” to tell the audience “what they want to hear” (Barney, 1996, p. 143). Contrary to what some metropolitan journalists may argue, however, community journalism does not constitute a weak form of journalism that simply panders to the public. Community newspapers have won Pulitzer Prizes for such important stories that exposed dangerous practices of a cult or that helped a community through the healing process after a devastating tornado (Hatcher, 2007).

Coble-Krings (2005) conducted a study similar to this thesis, though perhaps not on as large a scale. Coble-Krings mostly focused on small weeklies and their connections to the community. She writes “small-town newspapers were able to identify with their communities more because they were involved” (p. 67). These journalists were also likely to have a generally positive outlook on their community, and that members of the community wanted and expected their community newspaper professionals to practice the craft fairly and ethically.

Coble-Krings’ 2005 study was conducted among five weekly newspapers and did not compare their responses to larger dailies, and each of the dailies was located in the same geographical area: the state of Kansas. Coble-Krings does suggest future research to include larger newspapers. Reader (2006) included larger newspapers in his 2006 study, which was an exhaustive set of 28 interviews on differences in ethical values from newspapers in 28 different geographic regions. However, Reader’s study did not compare larger community papers with smaller weeklies. Instead, his larger newspapers consisted of newspapers with a circulation larger than 50,000. Instead of comparing metropolitan newspapers to community publications, as Reader did, this thesis will compare papers that are larger but with a small enough circulation to still be considered community newspapers.

Coble-Krings' study could provide guidance to similar studies in approaching ethical dilemmas of newspaper professionals and their community ties. Coble-Krings employs thick description and also lists many potential conflicts of interests in which editors have ties to community organization.

Community Journalism Research: Setting the Community Agenda

Researchers long speculated that a major part of the limited effects model of the media was that the press "may not be successful much of the time telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think *about*" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). The ability of the press to define society's important issues by focusing on them more heavily than others came to be known as the agenda-setting function. McCombs and Shaw (1972) famously measured the agenda-setting function in a study of the 1968 United States Presidential election. Since then, hosts of other researchers have studied the agenda-setting function of the media.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) noted the media should be expected to have impact on the public image of politicians because most people are exposed to politicians only through the press. Therefore, a citizen's awareness of many of the issues and decisions up for vote is often dependent upon what he or she might see in the press. In order to validate the media's ability to influence the public agenda to mirror its own, McCombs and Shaw studied media coverage of the 1968 United States presidential election between Richard Nixon and Hubert H. Humphrey. McCombs and Shaw examined newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media and concluded that there was at least a correlation between media coverage and the voting public's perception of important issues during the campaign. The issues that were covered more often were more likely to be viewed by the public as vital.

Hester and Gibson (2007) noted the effect that local coverage had on the perceived importance of the same-sex marriage debate. Using a time-series analysis, Hester and Gibson compared reactions to the issue between individuals in Atlanta and Chicago. They noted that the issue had added salience in Atlanta because Georgia was vetting a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Illinois had no such measure on the ballot, and therefore the Chicago residents did not show as significant an agenda-setting effect. Hester and Gibson concluded "it is unwise to lump local and national media coverage together" in research on agenda setting because an issue with added local salience would be perceived as more important than one significant only on a national scale.

Research has shown mixed results on the agenda-setting function at a local level. Gross and Aday (2002) discovered that frequent viewers of local television news, which covers much crime news, in the Washington, D.C., area were "more likely to mention crime as an important problem" (p. 418). Atwood, Sohn, and Sohn (1978) noted that a content analysis of two months of a small Southern Illinois newspaper and subsequent surveys of community members showed minimal agenda-setting effect, and that other factors, such as interpersonal communication, are also effective in promoting community discussion. Although Atwood et al. acknowledge the small correlation between the newspaper's content and the topics the community discussed, they ask whether, instead of agenda setting, there is a uses and gratifications aspect to consumers who seek out media that interests them because of what fellow community members are discussing.

Two other studies by Sohn also showed mixed results of agenda setting at the local level. In a longitudinal study with a nine-month time lag, Sohn (1978) modeled a study similar to other agenda-setting research, with a content analysis and two rounds of interviews. However, unlike previous studies that dealt mostly with political issues, Sohn wanted to study local topics that

were not political in nature. However, in that study, Sohn did not notice significant agenda-setting effects. Instead, it was much the opposite—respondents would hear about an issue from friends or family and then would seek out newspaper articles about what they had discussed.

Sohn followed up his study with another published in 1984, examining agenda-setting effects in a small coal-mining town. Conducting interviews with 150 residents and comparing responses to the newspaper coverage of the construction of a new mine in the area, Sohn hypothesized there wouldn't be many agenda-setting effects because of the obtrusiveness of the issue. In other words, he believed personal experience with the negative aspects of mining, such as personal injury to friends and family, would lessen agenda setting of the positive aspects of the mine's construction. However, the most common responses of community residents were of positive attributes: growth to the city, the addition of jobs, and its impact on the economy. This closely mirrored the newspaper's top three issues, although they were not listed in exactly the same order.

Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002) studied local attribute agenda setting. As agenda setting focuses on how coverage increases perceived importance of an issue, attribute agenda setting explores "the salience of issue attributes." For example, Kim et al. examined what aspects of the construction of a local shopping center were viewed as most important by the public and how they correlated with what issues were given the most coverage by the local newspaper. For example, articles were written about the economic and environmental impact of the construction. Their content analysis and telephone survey of 468 respondents showed that those who had read the newspaper coverage of the shopping center's construction were more likely to list the same aspects that were covered in the newspaper as important. However, because Kim et al. appear to

have asked the respondents directly about the categories they found in the newspaper, perhaps the researchers primed the subjects to a response—a limitation Kim et al. did not acknowledge.

Because of the mixed results of such local agenda-setting research, some scholars have asked whether the media are affecting the local agenda or whether the local agenda was affecting the media. For example, Weaver and Elliott (1985) coded the minutes of city council meetings in Bloomington, Indiana, and compared them to the coverage in the local newspaper of the council and its related issues. They found many issues of economics or politics, the reporter covering the city council was likely to write articles that emphasized the issues that were given extra importance by the council itself. However, on social or recreational issues the newspaper was more likely to rank issues as more important than the council.

Likewise, Gaziano (1985) studied neighborhood newspapers and interviewed leaders of neighborhood organizations to see what issues they promoted as most important. Gaziano's research showed that although the press did have some agenda-setting effects in defining local issues, community leaders exerted more influence than media. Gaziano did acknowledge that obtrusiveness played a strong role in even the community leaders' influence, as "leaders may exert the most influence when public attention to issues and knowledge about them are low" (1985, p. 591).

Some media even help set the agenda for their counterparts (Atwater, Fico, & Pizante, 1987). In these cases, media, such as television broadcasting outlets, radio stations, and newspapers, feed off each others' stories in order to create their media agendas. Of these groups, however, Atwater et al. found newspapers were the most likely medium to "set this longer range, more specific story agenda" (1987, p. 60).

Brewer and McCombs (1996), meanwhile, examined a newspaper that purposefully set out to influence the public and local politicians through the agenda-setting function. According to Brewer and McCombs, the *San Antonio Light* hoped to raise awareness to a host of children's issues, such as poverty, health care, education, or childcare, in the hopes of influencing the city to follow through on community projects to improve those areas. This, Brewer and McCombs note, was an extension of the public journalism movement. Public journalism was an attempt in the 1990s by several journalism outlets to take a more active role than traditional journalistic objectivity and detachment, instead attempting to invite readers to participate in democracy and the community (Rosen, 1996).

Brewer and McCombs (1996) attempted to gauge the response to the numerous of editorials and articles the *Light* published in regard to children's issues. Examining every issue of the newspaper from a single year, Brewer and McCombs conducted a thorough content analysis and then scrutinized the city of San Antonio's budget to see if there was an increased emphasis on the issues stressed by the *Light*. Brewer and McCombs noted that the city of San Antonio increased its budget by approximately $6 million that year in order to create or improve pro-social programs directed toward children in the community, such as police youth or youth recreation programs.

A review of literature involving community journalism raises many questions researchers can explore. Because of the *Gemeinschaft* aspect of community, or relationships that develop organically over time, it is possible that journalists who are members of a particular small community for long periods of time may form relationships with residents they cover. Judging by the research that has been performed on community journalism and ethics, especially concerning conflicts of interest (Reader, 2006), it is possible that these *Gemeinschaft*

relationships may hinder the production of good journalism. Therefore, because community newspapers may have the ability to affect the community agenda and what issues are deemed important, it is possible that a journalist's relationships could affect what issues the public lends credence. The next section will discuss research questions formed from the review of literature.

Research Questions

Considering the previous research into community newspapers and how the interview subjects interacted with sources on a personal level, especially the studies by Reader (2006) and Coble-Krings (2005), this study attempted to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of personal relationships with sources on traditional journalistic ethical values such as objectivity and detachment?

RQ2: What is the impact of membership in community organizations on traditional journalistic values such as objectivity and detachment?

RQ3: How do community newspaper professionals negotiate personal social ties within their news coverage?

RQ4: In what ways do the differences between small weeklies and larger community dailies influence how a community journalist negotiates personal relationships with sources?

RQ5: In what ways do the differences between small weeklies and larger community dailies influence how a community journalist negotiates membership in community organizations?

This thesis employed Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to measure the listed questions by allowing categories of data to emerge from qualitative interviews. The next section

will explore this process in detail including sample size, interview procedures, and analysis—organizing the data into categories that can be grouped together.

Method

The data was gathered through qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of newspaper publishers, editors, and reporters at community newspapers in the Intermountain West, which could be defined as Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Arizona. Fifteen interviews were conducted during a 3-week period at six community newspapers, two daily newspapers and four weeklies. The interviews were archived with a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions and original files were stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on an external hard drive. The transcripts were then analyzed using Grounded Theory and constant comparative analysis to highlight consistent themes that arose throughout the interviews. Qualitative coding software was not used. The categories were coded by hand, using pens of varying colors to separate the data. Themes began to emerge during three steps of coding suggested by Charmaz (1983): open coding, or separating the data into categories; focused coding, or narrowing the categories and developing subcategories; and selective coding, or selecting specific examples from the interview responses in order to better illustrate the categories and concepts.

For the purpose of this study, Lauterer's (2006) definition of community newspapers was used, namely a weekly or daily with a circulation of fewer than 30,000 subscribers that cover a distinct geographical area. The researcher chose the two daily newspapers specifically because they fit the selection criteria. The researcher selected the weekly newspapers through the suggestions of a consultant who had worked closely with management of a local press association. The consultant indicated that these weeklies were heavily involved in both covering

and taking part in community life. The two daily newspapers were both from communities that were roughly the same size and each had a circulation of between 15,000 and 16,000 subscribers. The weeklies all came from smaller towns, with circulations of less than 10,000 subscribers. Both of the daily newspapers had significantly larger editorial staffs than any of the weeklies, which tended to have less than 10 total editorial employees.

This thesis was influenced by two earlier works: Coble-Krings' 2005 thesis, which studied how journalists at five community newspapers in Kansas interacted with community members, and Reader's 2006 study, which compared community newspaper ethics to those espoused by metropolitan newspapers with circulations larger than 50,000. In contrast, this study was designed to compare responses from two daily community newspapers with a circulation of fewer than 30,000 subscribers to weekly newspapers in tight-knit communities with a circulation of fewer than 10,000 subscribers. This thesis also differed from Coble-Krings' work because it focused solely on journalistic practices, leaving aside questions about advertising. Only community journalism professionals were interviewed for this thesis, while Coble-Krings interviewed readers and community leaders.

Interviews

The following research explores the relationship of community journalism professionals to their sources using qualitative interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2004) state that the most important skill a qualitative interviewer should possess is the ability listen, but one must also be ready to include follow-up questions.

The use of emergent design is especially vital when allowing theory to emerge from data in an unbiased manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the interviews were semi-structured, consisting of a list of prepared questions and an unspecified number of follow-up questions

(Rubin & Rubin, 2004). As each successive interview was conducted, the researcher altered the list of prepared to address the previous results and refine the categories that emerged throughout the interview process.

The original interview structure consisted of a handful of basic demographic questions followed by 15 main questions that focused on a journalist's personal relationships within his or her community and membership in community organizations and how he or she feels journalists should conduct themselves in their ensuing news coverage. As the interviews progressed, probing questions were used to develop elaboration (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Probes consist of questions that are used to generate deeper context or explanation from a previous answer. A list of main questions asked throughout the study can be found in the appendix.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted over a 3-week period and averaged 27 minutes, 17 seconds in length. The longest interview was 1 hour 5 minutes and 24 seconds long. The shortest interview lasted 15 minutes 26 seconds. Interviews with editors and publishers tended to last longer than interviews with reporters.

In order to minimize discomfort for the subjects and to maximize convenience for the researcher, the majority of the interviews were conducted at their place of work. In each case, the interview was conducted in a private office or conference room. One interview was conducted at a local public library for the convenience of a community journalist, who was on assignment at the time. The respondents were not compensated, but they were promised that they would not be identified except by basic demographic information such as the circulation of the newspaper or the size of the town that the publication serves. In order to further protect the respondents' privacy, raw interview data was only observed by the primary researcher and the faculty mentor who oversaw the production of this thesis.

Grounded Theory

This study used Grounded Theory to analyze the data collected in the qualitative interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) lay out the basic groundwork of the Grounded Theory approach by stating that theory can be generated by examining "relationships between data and the categories in which they are encoded" (p. 218). As data was collected from the community journalism professionals, the author of this thesis examined commonalities in respondents' answers in order to code them into categories that could be compared across the various interviews. As Grounded Theory began to emerge and interpretation of the data became possible, data allowed for the hypothesis to be formed from the patterns that developed.

Grounded Theory can be used for a host of qualitative methodologies—especially those using some form of group or individual interviews. For example, it can be used to analyze data from focus groups (Andronikidis & Labrianidou, 2010), in-depth interviews (Coble-Krings, 2005; Rumsey & White, 2009), the diary-interview method (Thompson, 2008), triangulated studies involving surveys and open-ended interviews (Becker & Stamp, 2005), and case studies (Martin, 2008).

Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest that one of the most important aspects of Grounded Theory is analysis that is conducted while the researcher collects the data. Corbin and Strauss stress that it is vital to not wait until all data is collected because "analysis is necessary from the start because it is used to direct the next interview and observations" (p. 5). Therefore, when analyzing qualitative interviews using Grounded Theory, the interviews must evolve as codes and concepts begin to emerge through successive interview sessions. These codes and concepts must carry over into subsequent interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This process often requires

a researcher to abandon previously explored concepts if they such concepts are poorly represented (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

For example, during the first set of interviews for this research, all respondents mentioned the idea of political involvement without any prompting. The researcher subsequently altered the interview questions to include the idea of political involvement, including the ethics surrounding a journalist's opportunity to run for office, support political parties, or publicly support politically controversial issues. Likewise, in the first interview, the idea of "respect" was mentioned a couple of times. However, the topic did not factor prominently in subsequent interviews, and so the issue was folded into a general idea of public perception—which arose far more prominently.

Coding is defined by Charmaz (1983) as "categorizing and sorting data" (p. 111). The coding process for Grounded Theory is complex, consisting of three parts: open or initial coding, focused or axial coding, and selective coding (Andronikidis & Lambrianidou, 2010; Becker & Stamp, 2005; Charmaz 1983; Skeat & Perry, 2008; Thompson, 2008).

Charmaz recommends that a researcher follow four steps in the initial, or open, coding stage. First, Charmaz suggests researchers must identify the context in which the data is given, which can at least partly relate to the respondents' answers.

Second, Charmaz (1983) suggests a researcher begin to construct codes by examining what is present or missing from the data. This is done by identifying "patterns, inconsistencies, contradictions, and intended and unintended consequences" (p. 112). Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest that concepts are the codes that should be measured when constructing Grounded Theory. Rather than the data itself, it is "conceptualizations of data" (p. 7) that should be measured and coded.

In other words, using the codes that have been developed in the initial stage, the researcher begins to group pieces of each interview with corresponding excerpts from the other interviews together into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this research, respondents often referred to aspects of journalism practice that could be grouped into the category of professionalism. Corbin and Strauss (1990) note that not all concepts are similar enough to develop categories, which are "higher in level and more abstract than the concepts" (p. 7). However, these categories are vital to the coding process.

Third, Charmaz (1983) suggests searching for "*in vivo* codes" (p. 115), which involves scrutinizing interview data for imagery that respondents use with "power that far transcend their individual situations" (p. 115). Charmaz offers the example of a diabetic using the term "super-normal" to describe himself (p. 115). Charmaz used that imagery to develop another concept that could be studied.

Charmaz (1983) then offers a last step in the initial coding process: interpreting the data and comparing the various categories in order to discover the process outlined by the concepts. Corbin and Strauss (1990) stress that comparison is vital because concepts, not individuals, are what is being measured.

> The incidents, events, and happenings are taken as, or analyzed as, potential indicators of phenomena, which are thereby given conceptual labels. … Only by comparing incidents and naming like phenomena with the same term can a theorist accumulate the basic units for a theory. (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7)

The key to developing categories comes from repetition of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This is the case for both information that is present in data from respondents and

information that is ignored or omitted from responses. Thompson (2008) writes that thorough and repeated examination of the data is vital in this stage.

In this research, the initial open coding stage involved the use of differently colored pens and varied marking techniques to separate various concepts and categories that emerged from participants' responses. Each concept was then grouped into a handful of major categories to which they related. Using the aforementioned category of "professionalism," the researcher took such concepts as "objectivity," "obligation," and "integrity" and grouped them together.

Often a researcher will employ computer software that can aid in the open coding stage. For example, Andronikidis and Lambrianidou (2010) used the Atlas.Ti software to help take their data from transcription to categorization. However, the author of this study did not use software. The researcher personally coded and organized the data.

Following the initial coding stage, Charmaz **(**1983**)** suggests the researcher enter into a period of focused coding, also known as axial coding (Thompson, 2008). During this stage, the researcher begins to narrow categories by taking "a limited set of codes that were developed in the initial phase" and then applying the codes "to large amounts of data" (p. 116). This narrowing of the categories allows the researcher to then develop subcategories to explain the phenomena in greater detail (Charmaz, 1983; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Thompson (2008), axial coding allows the researcher to examine how the categories are interconnected, allowing the researcher "to formulate causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences" (p. 128).

As the researcher begins to select codes for use, he or she can also begin to develop models and diagrams (Skeat & Perry, 2008). In a study of the goals of chatroom participants, Becker and Stamp (2005) used the axial coding stage to examine both the causal conditions and

"the context in which they were embedded" (p. 246). For example, Becker and Stamp developed a model of impression management that had three causal conditions: "desire for social acceptance, relationship development and maintenance, and desire for identity experimentation" (p. 246-247). With these three causal conditions, Becker and Stamp were able to identify other categories that emerged from their interview dating during the open coding process—such as "using screen names" or "selective presentation"—related to one another (p. 247). The causal conditions were the motivations for the recorded behavior that emerged from the data. To illustrate the axial coding in this study, three models were constructed that can be seen in the results section of this thesis.

The final stage of analysis comes in selective coding, in which the researcher finds specific examples from the interview transcripts and applies them to the outlined categories in order to illustrate them (Thompson, 2008). For example, in his study of college students and academic support, Thompson's selective coding stage "involved searching for and selecting examples in order to articulate the storyline of how academic support occurred" (p. 128). As an example from this thesis, and again using concepts involved in the category of "professionalism," the researcher found examples and anecdotes that community journalists used to describe how they felt about a perceived journalistic obligation to report on criminal acts committed by people whom they knew on a personal basis and with whom they had either close personal or cordial business relationships.

Sample

The sample was purposive, consisting of four small weekly publications with a circulation of fewer than 10,000 subscribers and two larger daily community newspapers with a circulation of fewer than 30,000 subscribers. Each of the weeklies also came from a town with a

population of approximately 10,000 inhabitants—not counting surrounding communities the newspaper covered. Newspapers in the Intermountain West were chosen out of convenience because of the proximity to the researcher.

The two daily newspapers were chosen specifically by the researcher because they fit the selection criteria. The researcher selected the weekly newspapers through the suggestions of a consultant who worked closely with management of a local press association. The consultant indicated that these weeklies were heavily involved in both covering and taking part in community life.

In the interest of full disclosure, the researcher worked for several years for one of the sampled newspapers. He had not worked full-time for the organization in several years, but had, in recent months, submitted the occasional freelance column or article.

Newspaper 1. The first newspaper the researcher sampled is a daily publication with a circulation of approximately 16,000. According to the 2010 United States Census, the city it serves has a population of approximately 48,000. Judging from the conducted interviews, a local university, and the dominant religion—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—play major roles in community life.

At this newspaper, the researcher interviewed an editor and two reporters. None of them were native to the area, although two had worked at the newspaper for more than 15 years. The editor indicated that the organization has 18 full-time editorial employees and three or four part-time reporters. All three participants expressed a belief the area residents had a good sense of community because they are isolated from major population centers, but the area itself is large enough that the majority of the residents were not mutually well acquainted.

Newspaper 2. The second newspaper, also a daily publication, had the largest circulation of any newspaper in the study at just more than 20,000. The city from which it originates has seen explosive growth, and according to the most recent U.S. Census, its population is now nearly 73,000, nearly 50 percent higher than the previous decade's census (2010).

The researcher interviewed an editor and two reporters at this newspaper. According to the editor, there are 32 editorial employees spread through the newspaper's three bureaus, and few if any of the staff members have local ties. The editor indicated that employees at this newspaper tend to skew toward a younger demographic and often use employment at the newspaper as a stepping stone to larger organizations. Of the three employees interviewed, only one, the editor, had been in the area longer than 10 years.

According to the interview respondents, despite the area's explosive growth, a distinctive culture of community and family values—from a strong influence by the LDS Church—remains among residents, though the boom in population has made it so residents may be less likely to know each other.

Newspaper 3. The third newspaper is published in a bedroom community to a large metropolitan area. The twice-per-week publication has a circulation of 8,000, while the city itself supports a population of approximately 7,500, according to the 2010 Census data. Despite the town's resort aspects, residents are heavily involved in community activities and organizations, according to the publisher. The publisher also said membership in the LDS Church is not as common in the community as it is in many other rural areas in the state, but the city still has a significant number of Mormons in the city.

Here, a single interview was conducted with the publisher because editorial employees were trying to produce the next morning's newspaper. The publisher had worked for this

particular newspaper since the early- to mid-1980s. This publication employs seven people on the editorial side, and the publisher does not produce editorial content but is more involved in the business operation. Similar to the second newspaper, employees at the third newspaper do not tend to stay long in the area but use their time at the publication to gain experience before moving to larger publications.

Newspaper 4. Newspaper four is located, according to those interviewed, in a heavily LDS, conservative, and Republican-leaning area. This publication actually produces two separate weeklies. Each is based in a city located in adjacent counties. The two newspapers share employees but are distinct publications that focus almost exclusively on their own communities. Each newspaper has a circulation of about 5,000.

The cities have about 9,000 and 6,000 residents, respectively, according to the U.S. Census (2010). Between the two offices, the newspaper employs six editorial employees. The publisher contributes to the publication by writing articles and taking photographs. The researcher conducted an interview with the publisher, an editor, and an assistant editor who also works as a reporter. The publisher is native to the area and has been involved with the newspapers there for decades. The editor had recently moved to the area, while the assistant editor had worked there for approximately 1 year.

According to the publisher, the area has somewhat of a split personality. The permanent residents, especially those with school-aged children, tend to have a tight-knit community ideal, while another significant portion of the population, those who have moved to the area to work in the energy industry, did not have many community ties.

Newspaper 5. The fifth newspaper is a twice-per-week publication with a circulation between 3,500 and 4,000. It has a sister newspaper in a neighboring community, which,

according to the publisher, has a completely opposite cultural dynamic—but was not studied for this thesis. According to the U.S. Census (2010), the primary city in which the newspaper is based has a population of just fewer than 8,800.

This newspaper does not fit the mainstream culture of the state in many ways. First, according to the publisher, it is published in a heavily Democratic area in a state that leans mostly Republican. Second, the LDS Church does not have a dominant influence on local community life. According to an editor who was interviewed, there are many active churches in the area, and the LDS population tends to mix well with those who are members of other faiths.

The city shares a close-knit identity, especially because so much of the commerce can be tied to the energy industry, according to the respondents who were interviewed. The newspaper has two full-time editorial employees, an editor and a reporter; one part-time reporter who mainly works in advertising; and a publisher who contributes to the editorial product. All four employees who work at least part-time on the editorial side of the newspaper were interviewed for this project. The advertising employee and part-time reporter is native to the area and has many ties to the community through family and friends. The editor and publisher are not originally from the area, but they have both lived there for at least twenty years—with the editor having lived in the area since the 1970s. The third reporter had only been in the area for 2 years and was originally from another state.

Newspaper 6. The sixth newspaper is a family-owned publication produced weekly with a circulation of between 4,000 and 5,000 subscribers. It has only two full-time editorial employees and relies heavily on contributors. A publisher emeritus also contributes to the newspaper. Both of the editorial employees have strong ties to the area, having grown up there.

One interview was conducted at this newspaper with an assistant editor. The editor indicated that what was once a tight-knit community has grown considerably and has become more of a bedroom community to nearby metropolitan counties. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the city boasts a population of slightly more than 11,000. There is a strong LDS influence in the community, but because of the growth current residents are far less likely to know other residents.

Summary

The following results were collected using 15 qualitative interviews of journalism professionals at six community newspapers. Using Grounded Theory and comparative analysis, responses were separated into categories as they continued to emerge upon close analysis of the interviews. The most common responses involved discussions of professionalism, emotion, community involvement, and detachment.

Results

Ethics

The first research question dealt with the personal relationships that community journalists developed with sources and the impact that said relationships had on respondents' perception of traditional ethical values of the profession. Likewise, the second question concerned how journalists who may be involved in community organizations are affected by their membership in said groups. Because answers to the questions were largely similar, they will be addressed together.

Throughout the interview process, the idea of professionalism continued to surface in journalists' responses, especially as it related and contrasted to emotional responses.

Many subcategories that emerged from analysis of the data can be organized into the "supercategories" of professionalism, emotion, detachment, and community involvement (See Figure 1). For example, the idea of a journalist's responsibility to report the truth regardless of circumstances could fall under the supercategory of professionalism. An assistant editor from a weekly paper noted that sometimes journalists' friends or relatives who have been arrested may try to pressure newspaper employees not to publish the arrest: "Not everybody agrees with the way we do report it because it is somebody in their family, but we report it anyway."

Many of the most common themes that surfaced that can be attributed to professionalism include the ideas of objectivity, balance, transparency, fairness, truth, and a journalist's responsibility to serve the public good. Many participants expressed discomfort with the idea of having personal relationships with sources if it could in any way hinder performing their duties as journalists. Many respondents said they felt duty bound to stand as a watchdog or in an informative role. In accordance with that role, some respondents said they believed it was necessary for them to be honest about whatever relationships they had fostered and to recuse themselves from a story—or ask fellow journalists to recuse themselves—if they were intimately involved with a source quoted or mentioned in the story, as mentioned in the following excerpt from the editor of a community daily:

> *Excerpt 1*: I think we'd probably have to have a really good discussion to start with to figure out is this somebody that they knew very personally, and if they did, then we would probably look at somebody else having to write the story.

Journalists also worried about the perception of the public—especially as it pertained to negative responses to news coverage, credibility, or impropriety. Several respondents expressed discomfort at the perception of impropriety, whether or not said perception was justified.

Figure 1


Professionalism
■ Recusal —> Forced, voluntary, morality
■ Obligation/Responsibility
■ Watchdog
■ Balance/Fairness
■ Transparency/Integrity/Honesty
■ Public Perception: Credibility/Professionalism
■ Objectivity
■ Public Figure
■ Conflict of interest avoidance
■ Friendship —> Lack of, arm's length, acquaintances, personable, cordiality, different peer groups
■ Political involvement —> Advocacy avoidance, personal opinions kept private, confined to columns or opinion pages
■ Limit involvement based on beats and roles
■ Discouraged involvement
■ Observers
Detachment
Community involvement
■ Friendship —> personal, sources, romance, peers, degrees of friendship
■ Advantages —> Information, source development, source credibility, access, trust, story tips, expertise, knowledge, rapport
■ Political involvement —> civic duty
■ Encouraged involvement
■ "Greater good"
■ Contact —> Likely in small town
■ Involved in processes
■ Caution
■ Behavioral changes —> Suppression, denial, unequal treatment
■ Fear: Story avoidance, Source anger, loss of friendship, hurt feelings, betrayal, guilt, public's fear of journalists
■ Ethical Dilemmas: source pressure, advertising and sponsorship, friend or source expectations, favors, bias, conflicts of interest, "the line," agendas
■ Community expectations —> Coverage
■ Public perception —> Perceived impropriety
■ Reality —> Short-handed newsroom, necessity, business
Emotion

"Anything to avoid even the appearance of impropriety is such a big deal these days," one editor of a daily newspaper said. Some of the journalists who were interviewed saw themselves as public figures and therefore believed it was important for them to avoid anything that could even be seen as unfairness or a conflict of interest. The respondents often reported an awareness that the public expects them to be professional and to report the truth—as one reporter stated: "The newspaper is the information source of record, so what you print and what you say is going to be known as the truth and the facts."

Conversely, a few journalists also expressed concern that many emotional responses could arise if should a journalist grow too close to a story. Some believed that a journalist who was attached to a source could exhibit professional behavioral changes, such as story suppression, unequal treatment, or denial of wrongdoing. In essence, journalists were afraid if they or their coworkers had fostered a personal relationship with a source, they could approach a story differently than they would under any other circumstances. One editor of a community daily said it would be difficult for management to know what had transpired:

> *Excerpt 2*: If they're friends with somebody on their beat, it might not even come to the editor's attention. They'll just keep quiet the fact that so-and-so was involved in this or that controversial activity.

One of the most emotional of responses that interview subjects continued to express was fear. While most did not believe that they grew too close to a story on a regular basis, the journalists often stated that becoming close to a source or a community organization could cause a reporter to fear reporting a story. Respondents believed that reporters who had relationships with sources could be afraid of losing a friendship, hurting the feelings of a source, making a source angry, or experiencing feelings of guilt:

> *Excerpt 3:* Sometimes if I get really close to them, and I know that they're really counting on me to do a story a certain way, then I might take a different direction, I kind of feel guilty about it, and sometimes it will change my judgment a little bit on what I've published.

However, the reporter in the previous quote did state a belief that worrying more about what sources think than the obligation to report the truth would prevent a reporter from doing his or her job.

Many of those interviewed expressed a need to exhibit caution when reporting in small towns because of the close-knit facets of the community and the possibility of needlessly ruining a person's reputation. However, respondents almost universally expressed the obligation of a journalist to report the truth—even if he or she risked hurting somebody with whom he or she worked often or had a good relationship. "Let the source, let the people you're covering know that your first responsibility is to the reader," one editor of a weekly said.

A few of the journalists expressed a sense of reality. The aforementioned professionalism, with its espoused objectivity, fairness, and detachment, is ideal in their minds, but some said idealism has little to do with realistic practice. Two newspapers, for example, had two full-time editorial employees on staff. As a result, few options exist for recusal if an issue comes up. Others stated that some of the towns were small enough that even if a journalist did not have a friendship with a source, it was likely he or she could see that person around town.

Respondents referenced a host of ethical dilemmas that could have arisen from emotional responses to the formation of personal relationships with sources, especially in the smaller towns. For example, a few publishers acknowledged that their newspaper—while ideally striving to serve the public good—is, foremost, a business and must make money. Therefore, advertising

is a significant ethical dilemma—especially in a town with limited financial resources. "We do have a smaller advertising base compared to most of these other people, which means that each individual advertiser has much more clout in trying to influence decisions from time to time," one weekly editor noted, adding that the newspaper had never "caved" to advertising pressure. "But it still is a potential on something that may be carried in the back of your mind."

Likewise, reporters who form attachments with sources or community organizations may face a need to balance friends' or sources' expectations, while avoiding favors, bias, or conflicts of interest. Several respondents referred to a "line" that should not be crossed and must be carefully negotiated. However, most said that they would know the line before they crossed it.

Several of the subjects expressed a disdain for larger media outlets and a perceived lack of professionalism and a perceived tendency to sensationalize stories. Most of the journalists interviewed reported a believe that, despite the fact they knew local sources on a more personal basis, they were more likely to provide balanced coverage than reporters from larger media outlets who entered the area with a blank slate.

As a result, community journalists interviewed for this study often talked about a balance between community involvement and detachment (See Figure 1). The respondents had varied ties to the area they covered. Some were native to the town in which they worked, and as such had a host of ties—whether through family, friends, or community organizations—to people whom they covered. Others were not originally from the area but had worked for their publication long enough to develop strong relationships of mutual trust and respect with sources. Some respondents, however, were still fairly new to the area and were not likely to know sources on a personal level. One editor had moved to his current job from a Midwestern state less than 2 months before the interviews for this research took place.

According to the respondents, most of the newspapers discouraged political involvement—especially when it came to running for public office. However, each paper varied in its level of discouragement of political activity. Some journalists said that they believed they should vote but otherwise not participate in caucuses, political activities, or protests. One editor said he believed his reporters should stay completely neutral in political affairs: "We don't want anybody to be up-front on any political issues, marching down the street with a sign, circulating petitions, or taking any role in any organization that has any sort of political connection." Others said they believed political involvement to be their civic duty. For example, one editor clearly noted the responsibility of a journalist to vote in elections: "Just because you're a journalist doesn't mean that you aren't a citizen, either."

Some respondents said they believed that community involvement could provide advantages, especially in regard to the development of sources and rapport, as well as gaining information and access that would otherwise be withheld. Some respondents conversely said they believed that journalists should maintain an "arm's-length" distance and not cover organizations to which they belonged or sources with whom they had a personal relationship. The journalists in question often expressed a desire to remain cordial and personable with sources and community organizations but to not form friendships with them. As an example of cordiality but not friendship, one reporter from a daily newspaper said:

> *Excerpt 4:* It's kind of a conundrum because, I mean, you want to have good relationships with these people because they're people that you deal with all the time and for your stories, but you don't want to get too cozy to where, you know, it's a "you scratch my back I scratch yours" kind of thing.

Negotiation of Personal Ties

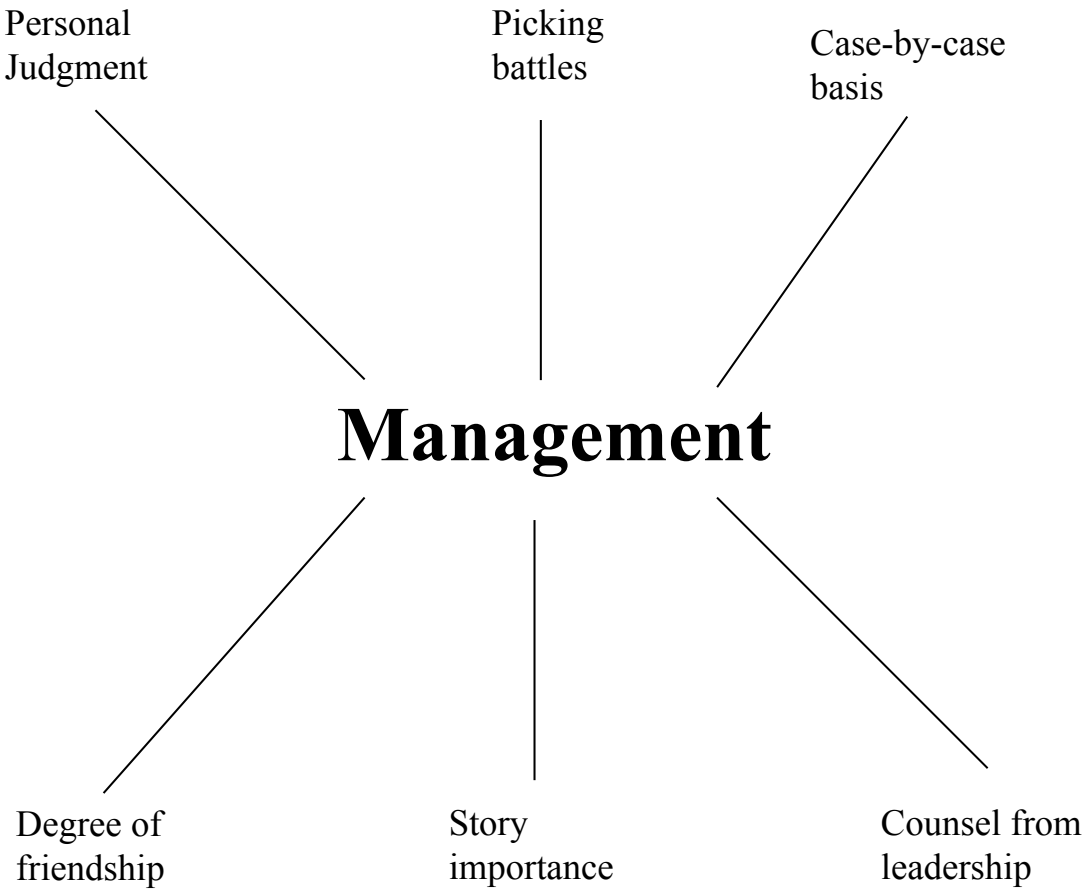
The third research question explored the way in which community journalists managed their personal relationships with sources and community organizations. Analysis of the interview responses provided six categories that emerged to indicate in which ways the interview subjects negotiated their personal ties (See Figure 2).

Most of the categories that arose from the data indicate that journalists believe that there is not one obvious solution to the ethical dilemmas that arise from community journalists having personal relationships with their sources. Editors and publishers seem to rely heavily on the personal judgment of their reporters, hoping their employees will know when they have reached the aforementioned "line" and that they will have enough professionalism and integrity not to cross it.

Most of the editors and publishers believed it was not their duty to micromanage their reporters' professional and personal lives, but they were not afraid to pull a reporter off of a story when required. Few of the publications had hard policies on managing relationships with sources or community organizations. Most of the policies that editors and publishers shared in the interviews involved political activity—specifically running for office or working for a campaign or candidate—or the acceptance of gifts.

Several respondents expressed the need for a community journalist to "pick battles" and know which articles were important enough to risk burning a source. In situations where a reporter perceived the issue to be of importance to the public, respondents believed it was their responsibility to serve as a watchdog and report the story. However, if an article's impact was minimal, some of the journalists expressed the desire to not risk burning a source's trust. Editors and publishers seemed to believe that, unless a source was a prominent member of a beat, such

Figure 2


Personal Judgment
Picking battles
Case-by-case basis
Management
Degree of friendship
Story importance
Counsel from leadership

as the mayor or a city councilman, that articles should be examined on a case-by-case basis to see whether the reporter in question is too close to the story.

When examining each case, most of the respondents, whether editors, publishers or reporters, believed it necessary to examine the degree of the reporter's relationship to a source or an organization. Generally, the journalists believed that it was always inappropriate to report on stories that involved family members or close friends. In those cases, respondents tended to believe journalists should recuse themselves from a story. However, if the story in question involved someone who was only an acquaintance, respondents often tended to grant the situation some leeway as long as the reporter believed he or she could remain objective. Ideally, however, most of the journalists believed a reporter should not cover an organization to which he or she belonged.

Another factor the respondents said they believed should be examined on a case-by-case basis was the prominence of the story itself. The editors and publishers that were interviewed seemed unconcerned that a reporter might write a column about personal experiences that did not affect the public or about minor issues in which an acquaintance may be involved. However, if an article were to involve criminal offenses or advocacy, it was more likely that respondents expressed the opinion that a reporter should be involved in covering a person or organization with which he or she was involved.

Finally, editors and publishers tended to believe that it was necessary to consult with the reporter on a personal level to determine whether the reporter could objectively cover the story.

Newspaper Size and Its Effects

The fourth and fifth research questions dealt with the difference in the size of community newspapers and the effect on involvement with sources and organizations. The research

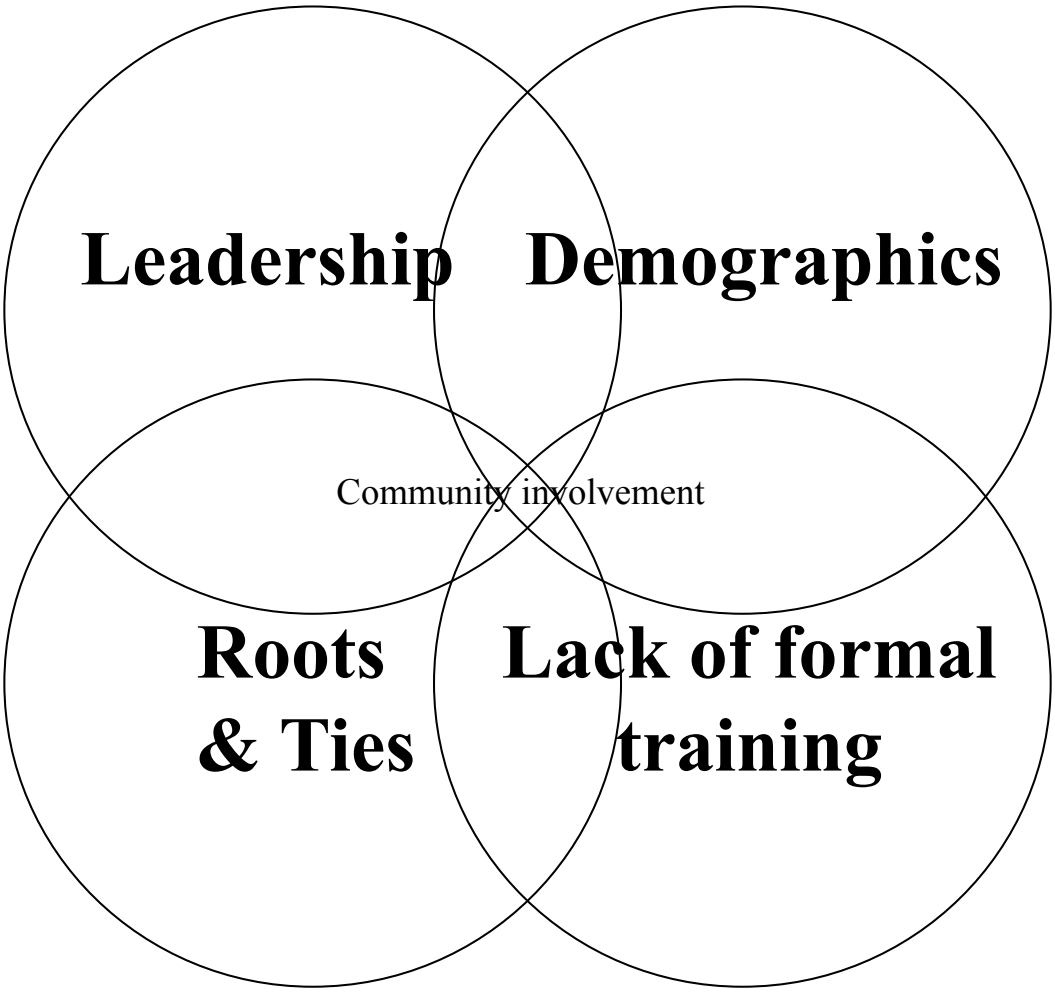
conducted in this study found size to be among the factors that affected the level of a journalists' involvement in the community. However, size did not seem to be the lone or even the dominant factor in determining community involvement. Instead, the results suggest four primary factors (see Figure 3) that affect a journalists' willingness to form attachment to the community: leadership, demographics (including but not limited to newspaper circulation and the size of the community), roots and ties, and the level of a journalist's formal training.

Leadership seems to play a leading role or hindrance to a respondent's attitude toward community involvement. For example, despite the fact that the two larger community dailies share similar circulations and demographical information, the editors interviewed had drastically different philosophies on involvement in the community. One editor encouraged involvement as long as a reporter refrained from covering stories that involved a person or organization with which they were intimately involved. The other editor, however, believed that a journalist should not get involved in organizations and should have few close friends in the community.

Likewise, a publisher of a community weekly strongly suggested that reporters become involved locally—especially should that involvement help a report to gain insight and understanding of processes and people they cover. Another publisher at a similar weekly newspaper suggested that reporters not get involved in community organizations "unless they're really benign."

As stated previously, demographics also seem to play into how likely a community journalist is to have personal relationships with sources. First, respondents said the size of the community plays a part in how likely a journalist was to have community ties. At both daily newspapers it seemed less likely that a reporter or editor would claim personal contact with sources away from the workplace—whether as friendships or simply incidental contact such as

Figure 3


Leadership
Demographics
Community involvement
Roots & Ties
Lack of formal training

seeing a source at a grocery store or at church. However, even at some of the smaller papers, some journalists said they were unlikely to be friends with their sources. The size of the newspaper or town does not seem to affect how likely a community journalist is to become involved in community organizations. At both dailies and weeklies, there were reporters or members of management who were involved in organizations and employees who were not.

One editor suggested that a key demographical aspect was the age of the reporter. Several publishers or editors mentioned that their newspapers tended to be the first place many of their reporters had been employed as journalists, and subsequently the ages of their reporters tend to skew to a younger demographic. As a result, as the first editor mentioned in this paragraph pointed out, many reporters tend to fall in different age demographics than their sources. As such, they tend not to personally associate with sources such as mayors or city council members, who tend to be much older. Certainly not every reporter at a community newspaper is young, just as not every source will be older, but age does seem to play a viable demographical factor role in deciding whether a reporter will become involved in the community.

Community culture can also play a role in a journalist's desires to become involved. This especially seemed to be the case in towns where reporters' political and religious backgrounds matched those espoused by the members of community. Conversely, one publisher stated some employees struggle to connect with the community because their personal ideals were so strongly opposed to those espoused by the local residents. Local culture especially appears to have an effect in some of the towns that boast overwhelmingly LDS populations.

The third aspect that affects a journalist's community involvement would seem to be obvious: a media professional's roots and ties to the area. As many of the community journalists are relatively new to the profession, some do not have strong ties to an area—having moved to

the area for work. But journalists who were native to the area that they covered or who had been in their coverage area for long periods of time did seem to have more family and friends in the area—although this did not always factor into whether a journalist belonged to community organizations or believed that a journalist should cultivate such involvement.

Finally, the level of a reporter's, editor's, or publisher's formal journalism training also appeared to affect whether respondents believed journalists should become involved in the community. The publishers who were interviewed that did not attend journalism school—even if they had worked in community journalism for long periods of time—tended to be less worried about their reporters' involvement in community organizations than those who had undergone formal journalism training. This was not always the case, but it did manifest itself on several occasions.

Discussion

Analysis of the data allowed several themes to emerge, which will be explored in detail in the following section. These themes include involvement in the community, professionalism, emotion, ethical dilemmas, detachment, management, and sources of involvement.

Involvement in the Community

The respondents said they had various levels of involvement in the community. As stated in the previous section, some reporters or editors had lived for many years in their communities, and some of them had developed many personal ties to friends and family who lived in the area. This was not universally true, however, as one editor who had lived in the area nearly 20 years said he had few friends in the community.

Likewise, many of the journalists were involved or had children who were involved in community groups. Organizations of which respondents were members included fraternal

organizations such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club, Free Masons, and the Kiwanis Club; arts groups such as community orchestras; businesses organizations, such as the chamber of commerce; and local churches—especially The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the dominant faith of the area. One publisher said he had been involved as a firefighter, an emergency medical technician, a search and rescue worker, a member of the chamber of commerce, Rotary and Lions clubs, and had even served on the city council.

However, just as some of the professionals who were interviewed did not have any familial or friendly ties to the community, some believed belonging to community groups violated their duties as a reporter. The following section will discuss the issues and dilemmas respondents raised while exploring the meaning of community involvement and its connection to their responsibilities as journalists.

Professionalism versus Emotion

Respondents spent a great deal of time during the interviews talking about ethical norms of the profession. During analysis, a conflict of professionalism and emotion—and among them a host of ethical dilemmas such as conflicts of interest—took shape. Most of the journalists interviewed believed their own work and performance tended toward the professionalism side, but they believed that if a reporter became too close to a source or an organization, he or she might allow emotion to cloud journalistic objectivity and professionalism.

Obligation. The most common idea relating to professionalism that the respondents shared involved the obligation and responsibility that a reporter had to the truth and his or her duty to share it with the citizens of the community, as stated by one reporter at a small-town weekly:

> *Excerpt 5*: You have a responsibility to be a nonbiased observer here, and when you observe something that the community needs to know about and it affects them financially, emotionally, and for their safety, you have an obligation to report those things, and that can be hard.

In a set of interviews at a weekly newspaper, every journalist interviewed independently brought up the same recent incident to illustrate how their responsibility trumps personal feelings. A local, high-ranking law enforcement official had recently been arrested and charged with criminal activity. All of the professionals interviewed at this newspaper stated they had a good relationship with the officer, and each of them reported having high regard for him on a personal level. However, each respondent from this publication independently stated that despite personal feelings, it was the duty of the newspaper to report the story. "I'm not happy about it, but those are the ethics of the profession that drive this—not any kind of personal relationship that you have," the editor of the newspaper said. "We all know the guy. We all like the guy," a reporter added. "The story got reported by the letter of how it went out."

An editor at one of the daily newspapers said a previous manager—"an old haggard newspaper man"—was adamant that reporters should worry more about doing their jobs than what a source might think of them for reporting a story: "He would yell, 'You want 'em to like ya, or you want 'em to respect ya?' I pass that on as you have a job to do."

Respondents seemed fearful that becoming too close to a source or an organization would compromise their ability to share truth that mattered to the community. As such, many of them said they made a point not to fraternize with sources away from the workplace. Respondents said eschewing personal ties with the community, allows reporters to be more comfortable should the need arise to approach a source about a controversial or sensitive subject.

One reporter said he had to approach local law enforcement to research a story about sensitive documents that had not been properly disposed of and had been stolen. Because this reporter did not have a personal relationship with government officials beyond the workplace, he did not feel uncomfortable reporting the story:

> *Excerpt 6:* Two people can share information whether they're friends or not. If me and the police chief were buddies, I could still ask him, 'how's that new $30,000 police cruiser you just bought or 10 of them or whatever.' We could talk about everyday things. But when there comes a time that I need to ask him, 'Why did you throw away a box of documents that should have been shredded,' I personally start to feel inhibited to ask these straightforward general questions because I don't want to offend him."

Most respondents said they believed that members of their profession are duty bound to inform the public, not just to entertain. This shared perception extended to a shared belief that emotional responses to conflict between personal and professional lives were generally not appropriate.

Watchdog status. One of the obligations by which respondents said they felt bound was the watchdog role of the journalism industry. As a result, many respondents said that they believed it was their duty to monitor government agencies and local businesses in order to serve the public good and discover anything that might potentially harm members of the community. According to one reporter:

> *Excerpt 7:* That's kind of the beauty of real journalism. We are sort of insulated from external influences, and that allows us to be watchdogs. It's not black and white, but we have to maintain a certain distance so that we can be observers of public policy of government action.

Respondents said they believed community involvement could both help and hurt a news agency's ability to play watchdog. One publisher suggested that the prominence of a story could determine whether or not community involvement could hinder a journalist's ability to perform that role: "There's certain areas where it's more prevalent, and I would suggest that that's in the planning department, the city council, the mayor's office, the county council, the planning commission in the county."

Another small-town publisher, however, believes community involvement "does nothing but help" in the watchdog role of the journalist: "The more involved you are in the community, the more you understand that community, the better you can be a watchdog. The better you understand what's going on." Understanding this context, the publisher added, allows the reporter to fulfill the watchdog role in the correct manner, instead of tearing down the community: "Watching over somebody isn't a watchdog. It's a bulldog ready to eat something when something goes wrong. Community journalism is much, much more than that."

A reporter at a similar-sized weekly—who was native to the area and had a host of friends and family involved in the community—said it was important for residents to understand that regardless of personal ties, a journalist would be willing to perform his job as the community watchdog: "I like the analogy of a dog for this reason: Even the dog that is your friend that you know very well that you go around every day, will turn and bite you if you don't pay attention."

Analysis of the interviews showed that even with the likelihood of knowing community members on a personal level, community journalists take their role as a watchdog for the community seriously. Respondents said they felt duty bound to protect the citizens of the community from government and businesses—but also felt compelled to balance that duty by reporting the truth.

Transparency, honesty and integrity. Not all of the journalists who were interviewed agreed whether a journalist should have personal relationships in the community that he or she covered or whether it was appropriate for a reporter to belong to community organizations. However, most respondents said they believed if a reporter was involved in the community, it was vital for he or she to be open about it—especially with newspaper leadership.

Honesty and transparency extends to three parties. First, some journalists believed a reporter should be honest with the source or organization about his or her intentions. One reporter at a community daily believed that a reporter should not be covering an organization in which he or she were involved—ideally, at least. "But if they have to, they would have to let that organization know right off the bat that there might be some things they don't like about it." Another reporter said: "Just be honest and up-front about what you want. I feel like, at least for me, that's the best policy."

One editor said he was asked to serve on a local nonprofit leadership board "meant to build community leaders by giving them knowledge of different goings on." However, he saod he believed that there could be conflicts involved because many of the topics covered in the classes for this board involved subjects his newspaper covered—often on a daily basis—such as education, health, and law enforcement. To avoid issues of impropriety, the editor approached the board's leadership and expressed a desire to avoid those topics, instead focusing on benign subjects:

> *Excerpt 8:* I ended up working with growth day and with history day. Because you don't rewrite history, and growth, my part was to provide the statistics . . . . My presentation was here is our population; here's how it's grown; here are some contributing factors that

are widely agreed to, and that was it. If I had done—let's use education day—we're in all these schools through the course of the day and we end up in the district office.

Second, respondents said that they believed that it was important for a reporter to be honest with the leadership of the newspaper. One publisher said that he asks his reporters to be up-front with possible conflicts of interest when they are first hired: "We expect someone to come forward and say, 'Wait a minute, I really shouldn't be writing this article.'" The editor of the same publication added, "I think they'd have to have a relationship with their editor that they know what's going on."

Finally, respondents said they believed that a reporter should be honest with him- or herself about whether or not they are too close to a story. "Everybody knows what the expectation is," one editor said. One reporter said a journalist should know when it is time to step away from a story:

> *Excerpt 9:* They have to be honest with themselves and say if something comes up where you're considering not writing about something and not reporting something because you're afraid of how it would affect that relationship, they definitely shouldn't if they crossed that line.

A publisher said he believed that his reporters were not particularly likely to cross that line, and he indicated that he had faith that his employees would do their jobs with integrity: "I have to believe that their best intention is to act with character and integrity and do their job and not bend their story." One assistant editor of one of the smaller newspapers at which interviews were conducted said he believed that honesty and integrity with the community could help build a "bond in the community"—especially if a journalist is willing to be honest about the mistakes

that he or she makes: “There have been stories where I’ve had the facts wrong, and I’m the first to write an apology.”

The journalists who were interviewed mostly said they believed that honesty and transparency could lessen the impact of ethical dilemmas that arise from involvement in the community. Respondents seemed to think that it was ideal to limit coverage to articles in which they were not personally involved, but if it were necessary, it would be vital for community members and newspaper management to know what to expect from reporters.

Recusal. Along with the need to be honest with supervisors or with themselves, respondents said they felt the need to know when to remove a reporter from a story—or when a reporter should voluntarily step away from an article. Recusal was a common theme respondents stressed when discussing whether a journalist should have personal ties to the community.

Forced. Most of the respondents focused recusal discussions on voluntary efforts by reporters to remove themselves from stories on which they become too close. However, there were some respondents in management positions who addressed the need to occasionally remove an employee from a story against his or her will.

> *Excerpt 10:* I think it’s rare when someone directly on their beat is someone they know closely. And if they did we would probably want to change their beat. If they were friends with the mayor or somebody in the school district high up or something like that.

The editor quoted above was a rare example of a journalist imposing the thought of recusal on another professional. Most respondents seemed to hope a reporter would be honest enough with him- or herself to know when it was time to walk away. However, should the need arise, said they were willing to pull a reporter from a story—and were not afraid of how the reporter might react to the story being reassigned. One editor suggested that she might approach

the issue it with the reporter in question and allow the journalist to write a column or a softer, experienced-based piece.

Another editor, who had not been in the area long but had worked in community newspapers for nearly a decade, suggested that such problems are rare, but that he has had to pull a reporter off of a story before:

> *Excerpt 11:* It was a long time ago, and it wasn't here. But there was a staff writer who felt too close to a source in a story and didn't want to believe this person was accused of what was actually true. … So we had to take her off and go with somebody else.

Editors hoped that a reporter would be honest enough with their supervisor from the beginning to voice possible conflicts in order to avoid having to make the change later in the process. If not, however, respondents appeared willing to make the change at any point. "Maybe if something ever happened with [an organization to which a reporter belonged], I imagine [the publisher] would assign someone else," one reporter said.

Voluntary. As stated previously, many of the respondents said that they believed a reporter should be honest enough to step away from a story on his or her own without the need of an editor to make the decision. Several of the reporters who were interviewed said that they had voluntarily removed themselves from articles—and even beat assignments—because of a relationship that they had cultivated in the community.

For example, one reporter was related to the public information officer from a local law enforcement agency. Because of her relationship, she voluntarily recused herself from covering public safety issues—which later became her beat when she moved to an office in a different city. "I think that not everybody knew that we were related, but I think if I would have covered

those stories, and had it come out that we were related, it probably would have caused a scandal or something," she said.

Another reporter was an amateur pilot who was interested in covering aviation articles. He felt it was important for him to write these because he had a level of expertise in a complex field that he could share in his articles. However, when he became employed part-time by the local municipal airport, he removed himself from most aviation coverage.

> *Excerpt 12:* As I take this job, I'm going to have to divorce myself from covering airport news and aviation news because I don't want it to appear slanted at all. Traditionally, it's been a topic that requires some knowledge of aviation, and so I have volunteered to do it. But if I take a job at the airport, I probably won't want to cover specifically airport news.

The reporter did not remove himself from all aviation news, stating he would not have a problem covering breaking news of public safety such as a plane crash. However, if an article involved "airport politics" or "it's specifically related to my engagement with an organization," he knew he would have to recuse himself.

One editor, who had a personal relationship with a local judge, said he recused himself from editing or directing any coverage from court cases that specifically involved a decision that the judge in question would have to make. However, recusal from covering articles involving friends and organizations does not seem to preclude using personal contacts to provide story tips or expertise for other reporters. The same editor said he had a reporter who was bilingual and heavily involved in the local Spanish-speaking community—especially with the LDS Church. Because of that relationship, that reporter was not allowed to cover issues involving the local Spanish branch of the LDS Church. However, that doesn't mean stories were ignored:

> *Excerpt 13:* He'll bring it up in our news meeting and we try to figure out a way of covering that story. He may actually go out with the reporter on that story and help with the translation, but not necessarily write the story with his byline.

It would appear that recusal does not mean that a journalist can't share information. The journalists simply believed it was necessary to make sure that the journalism process and the articles themselves would be unbiased. Therefore, it was appropriate for a reporter to share knowledge of things in which they were involved—as long as they weren't driving the coverage of them.

Public perception: Public figures, credibility, and professionalism. Several of the journalists interviewed expressed an understanding that media representatives are local public figures, and, as such, need to be sure that, in their personal interactions with community members and organizations, they represent their paper in a professional manner. "Lots of friends know that I work for the paper," one reporter said.

An editor likewise noted that when in public, reporters are the face of the newspaper—and if a reporter is too close to a subject, it could skew public perception toward the paper:

> *Excerpt 14:* They also have to be very cognizant of how people look at them. I think our staff understands this very well. People look at them, as for that instant, when they're in front of a group of people, they are the face of the (newspaper). Doesn't matter if I'm there, our [publisher is] there, just doesn't matter. Whoever's on the scene at the time . . . as long as you're there you're representing the newspaper.

One reporter noted that in his small town, it was clear that the newspaper is the "information source of record." As such, journalists need to understand the responsibility that comes with that designation: "What you print and what you say is going to be known as the truth

and the facts. That's just the way that the community views what we print." Another reporter noted that he needed to be careful what he said away from his role of a reporter because he could "sway opinions" even on something he isn't covering:

> *Excerpt 15:* I've put myself, even though it's a small community, on a pedestal. So I need to be careful. . . . I'm going to reserve certain things that I think and feel to myself . . . . People respect what I say.

As public figures and visible faces of the newspaper in a small community, the respondents said they therefore understand the need for the public to perceive the newspaper and a journalist to have credibility. One reporter noted that she believed that in most communities the public does not perceive journalists to have much credibility—which she believed to be a fallacious notion:

> *Excerpt 16:* I think that you get a bad rap by outside people for being a journalist because they don't completely understand what the ethics that we follow are. . . . They may think that journalists are kind of slime, but, realistically speaking, I think that most journalists . . . try and follow those ethical standards anyway.

One small-town weekly publisher said he believed that his newspaper had a significant advantage in credibility over the larger outlets because not only did his staff know sources on a more intimate level—thereby understanding context—and he believed larger publications tend to sensationalize the news: "I'll tell you what. What affects credibility is when you don't get things right. And that's why people don't believe [larger outlets]. Because, there's so many things they don't get right."

As an example, the respondent cited a case of a mayor of a nearby town, who was arrested and charged with what the publisher called a misdemeanor DUI as a first offense. The

publisher's newspaper printed the mayor's name in the jail bookings and listed a story on an inside page, while larger outlets heavily emphasized the story the next day.

> *Excerpt 17:* They came down and took video, made a big deal out of it. On the comment boards, "oh these high paid mayors should be." . . . The guy makes a hundred dollars a month to be mayor of a town of 1,500 people. He made a mistake. . . . We're not going to make it worse. They drag it out. I refuse to do that. The facts are the facts and that's that, and we don't need to go any further and drag in all these other things.

The publisher did say that some residents of his community have a tendency to believe that his publication protects local government or law enforcement officials, which he argued was not the case. In his interview, he stated he believed that locally his newspaper had more credibility than the larger outlets because his reporters would wait to print anything until they believed they had all of the facts that were relevant to the story.

Not every journalist who was interviewed for this research reported a belief that his or her paper had good credibility with the local community. One editor noted that his small weekly paper suffered in credibility because it had limited staff, and as such it relied heavily on freelance contributors: "I'll be honest, there have been months where circulation has dropped because our credibility was crap." He lamented the struggling credibility of his newspaper, stating his belief that it was a lack of credibility that had killed a competitor in his town: "They offended so many people in the community and they didn't do a follow up story to either say, 'We were wrong or here's the other side' that they lost credibility."

Respondents said the credibility of small-town newspapers might also suffer because of relationships that reporters have with community sources or organizations. One publisher stated that his newspaper lost credibility because of a relationship that one of his reporters had with a

source. This reporter covered a story involving a death at a local business, but "had been in contact with one of the parties that had an adverse relationship" with that business:

> *Excerpt 18:* Frankly, I saw what he wrote and it just didn't hit me that it was so obvious until it was in print. It's funny how that is. It's like when you write an email, and it looks perfect, and you review it once you've sent it when it's sitting in your inbox and there's a glaring grammatical error, and you just go, "How could I have sent that?" How could I have printed that story the way it was? And it really was just a one- or two-sentence line that absolutely destroyed the story and in my opinion hurt our credibility.

According to one reporter, the nature of small towns and the relationships that reporters have with sources makes it important for a journalist to safeguard his or her credibility: "I like to make sure I'm alibied on things because it's so small here that if you ever did something that's not true, you'd burn to the ground. You'd never be trusted again."

Along with the credibility that newspapers in small towns hope to build with the community, respondents also believed that members of the community expected them to exhibit professionalism, as exhibited in these excerpts:

> *Excerpt 19:* I think people understand that sometimes you have to ask hard questions and questions that make them uncomfortable and you uncomfortable too. But, again, if we don't do it here at the paper, who's going to do it?
>
> *Excerpt 20:* I think a lot of people recognize that you have to be able to do your job, and I think that people, for the most part, are at least respectful of that.

One editor spoke of a previous town in which he worked where he attended church with the city manager. Even though they weren't necessarily friends, he believed he had a cordial relationship with the manager, but each understood the other had a job to do—especially if the

editor had to write something controversial: "We've done some watchdog type stories on the city government. And he was like, 'Well nothing was wrong; nothing was incorrect; you've got to do what you've got to do.'" Therefore, it would seem that the respondents not only expect themselves to act in a professional manner—the respondents said they believe public also expects journalists to be professional.

Balance, fairness, objectivity, and truth. One of the best ways respondents said they believed they could manage their personal relationships with sources in small communities—and thereby build their credibility—was to ensure that they reported in a professional enough manner to ensure balance, fairness, and objectivity.

Many of the respondents said that they saw balanced reporting as vital in ensuring that personal relationships do not get in the way of good journalism. When reporting a story, many of the respondents said they felt it was their duty to get all sides of the story. One editor spoke of a story in which a special-needs child had been left on a school bus and how she felt it was important to be able to garner a response from the school district. Another reporter and his publisher both shared their perception of an ongoing issue of a local company that was seeking to dispose of low-level toxic materials. Both the reporter and the publisher said they believed it to be crucial to report multiple stories in order to allow the concerned town's citizens to have an equal voice along with the business, as shown in Excerpt 21. The reporter was a resident of the town in question and was seeking to balance the story between the townspeople he knew and a company for which he had once worked.

> *Excerpt 21:* As the story broke, I was there with the city council and [the company]. And that meant that they're the ones that give the information and the information comes out. Well, I gave [the company's] and the city's side of the story because those were the

> people who were speaking. And so I've got the community in an uproar. "Are you a puppet for them, what's wrong, why aren't you telling our side." So a couple of meetings later, the city and residents were given an opportunity to speak in a public hearing. Well, that was what I observed. So that's what I reported. So, two days later I get a call from the company.

Both the editor and the reporter said it was obvious that no matter what they did, no matter how hard they tried to balance it, somebody—maybe even both sides—would be angry about the story. But they seemed to indicate that what mattered was doing their jobs professionally.

At a third newspaper, an editor said that beyond ensuring that a news agency approaches residents on both sides of an issue, the reporter has a duty write a story with an awareness that what the reporter writes will affect small-town opinions. Therefore, the editor said that a journalist must write in a fair and professional manner: "Instead of coming out and saying, 'This evil someone who goes around killing horses—deathmonger.' It's like, 'well, so and so was caught by police such and such day killing horses in the field.'"

That balance leads to inevitable discussions of fairness and objectivity, which some respondents said they thought would be compromised if a person had a personal relationship with sources or community organizations that he or she covered, as shown in the following interview excerpts:

> *Excerpt 22:* It could obviously be a problem when it creates a conflict of interest, and you're not going to want to maybe be as objective. . . . If things aren't particular good in that situation, and it's somebody you know, you might be reluctant to go in that direction.

Excerpt 23: It goes back to the fundamental issue of character and integrity, and knowing that you need to be purely objective in developing a news story.

One journalist suggested that a professional can safeguard his or her objectivity when he or she may know somebody involved with a story by simply showing a dedication to the truth: "You make sure it's a complete and accurate story, and then you report it." Another stated: "Your job as a journalist is to continue and make sure that you report the truth honestly and accurately if you're a part of that organization or not."

According to another, reporting the truth is not always easy—especially when a report must ask questions that could make him or her or the source uncomfortable. However, if the reporter informs that he or she is dedicated to writing the truth, honest can ease the situation: "You do a lot better if you learn to sit back and say, OK, these are the facts, and this is what I'm going to report. And I'm not going to go beyond that." Regardless of how journalists feel about a particular story, respondents said they believe the truth would safeguard objectivity.

Emotional Responses

Fear. As stated previously, much of the discussion with the respondents concerning how they manage their personal relationships—especially as it pertains to relationships with sources—examined the balance between professionalism and emotional responses. One of the strongest emotional responses that emerged from analysis of the interviews was fear. Respondents often expressed personal fears that they said they felt while covering stories that involved sources they knew on a personal level—or that unprofessional reporters might experience in said situations—but respondents also addressed fears that the public might have about journalists. This section will examine responses in which fears could arise and conflict

with professionalism should a reporter grew too close to a source or an organization: story avoidance, source anger, fear of a loss of friendship, hurt feelings, betrayal, or guilt.

Story avoidance, source anger, fear of loss of friendship. Personal relationships and the conflicts that arise from cultivating them could cause problems with reporters fearing to report on a story because they are more worried about what sources or organizations might think than they are reporting the truth, several of the journalists said. The relationships of journalists with the dominant faith of the area, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will be explored further in a later section of this thesis. However, one editor shared the fears of a reporter who was a recent convert to the religion—and the editor believed the reporter's faith got in the way of his ability to perform his duties. The editor in question said that his newspaper was printing a story about the many ways in which the LDS faith influenced life in the community. The reporter, who was about to marry another member of the faith, was assigned to write a "somewhat controversial" article:

> *Excerpt 24:* He kept dragging his feet on the story. And finally I said, "Well, are you going to do this story or not? Here's some people you can contact." He said, "We'll, I'm getting married. We're getting married in the temple, and I don't want to jeopardize that." And so, here it came out, after all this foot dragging over a 2-month period, that he was worried about his position and his standing in the church and was afraid to do the story.

Judging by the analysis of the interviews conducted in this study, such responses do not appear to be common. Respondents, in general, said they believed they and their colleagues were likely to be professional when faced with an ethical dilemma. They especially trusted themselves to know when they became too close to a story that they could remove themselves from coverage should a conflict arise.

However, other reporters acknowledged fearful reactions were always a possibility if a journalist were to grow too close to a source. The biggest fears that many of the respondents reported having were of how they would cope should a source be accused of doing something criminal or unethical. Respondents reported fearing a reluctance to report the accusation, as one editor put it, in order "protect your friend." Excerpt 25 shares another reporter's feelings on fear:

> *Excerpt 25*: I think once you start realizing that, "I'm not writing about this or including this in a piece because I don't think that it would reflect on them"—once you start thinking about their feelings, and what it could mean to your relationship more than the story, then that could be a problem.

One editor suggested that fearful responses that get in the way of a journalist's ability to do his or her job are more common at his newspaper among employees who cover sports: "Our reporters get really close to the coaches and want to kind of serve the coaches and be friends. [They] don't want to make the coaches mad, and I think that compromises our reporting pretty heavily."

Along with the fear of angering a source, some respondents expressed a concern that becoming too close to a source might lead to a reporter being afraid to lose that friendship. One assistant editor hinted that if she had to cover a story involving a friend, she would immediately recuse herself—not just because of the journalistic ethics, but also because she feared alienating that friend:

> *Excerpt 26:* I'm looking out for No. 1 in that situation. For the most part, if it's not going to affect me and my relationship with that person, I will do the interview. . . . If it came down to I may lose that friend, I may assign it to somebody else.

However, most respondents said they did not believe that they would have a problem reporting the truth when necessary. A publisher said that journalists cannot afford to allow said fears to compromise their journalistic integrity. Instead, he said, they should recognize that alienating people is one of the unfortunate hazards of the business, as is serving the public good. As an example, the publisher cited a good friend he lost approximately 8 years before when the publisher said had the friend been caught embezzling money and served a 90-day jail sentence:

> *Excerpt 27:* He won't talk to me anymore. In fact, we brought it up somehow in an article that we were talking about things that happened in the past, and he wrote me this really nasty letter. You're going to have that. You just have to plan that sometimes you're going to lose friends in this business. But, you know, you can't deny your public responsibility to tell the truth.

Among their own feelings of fear, respondents from small towns said that they also deal with the public's fear of journalists. This fear becomes especially difficult when a respondent attempts to gather information for articles, especially if a previous journalist's insistence on focusing on negative aspects of community life had harmed the public's relationship with the newspaper. One editor, who had arrived in the area only a year before, said she found it difficult to build sources and gather information, especially involving the school district, because of widespread distrust of the community newspaper.

> *Excerpt 28:* Everybody had a preconception about the paper, and the hardest thing was getting people to talk to me because they were like, "The paper is out to get me." So, for the first 6 months of my job here, I was working with people to get them to trust the paper.

The editor's said her response was to let her sources know that even though it was her duty to often report the truth in a way that might not reflect well on the community or the people in it, that she largely was trying to help the community by making sure residents were accurately informed. A journalist's ability to cancel out fear with professionalism and transparency seems to be key to a reporter's ability to manage articles in which they may feel too invested.

Behavioral changes. Emotional, less professional responses to sources' feelings can lead to behavioral changes from reporters who might normally practice objectivity, according to the journalists who were interviewed. Many of these responses go even further than the aforementioned story avoidance, including the suppression of information, denial, and unequal treatment—covering a story that involves a friend differently than they would have had it involved any other person.

For the most part, respondents said they did not believe that they or their colleagues were involved in unethical conduct. However, one journalist indicated that the publisher of the local newspaper is heavily involved in the community and has been known to suppress positive articles about groups that have offended the paper. The respondent indicated that one organization in particular has not received any coverage since an incident that offended the publisher:

> *Excerpt 29:* We're not allowed to mention their name without absolutely having [the publisher] come unglued. That's wrong. People who don't pay their bills, say through their printing end or the advertising cost, their bill through the newspaper, we drop them. We don't do any stories about them at all. This is the unwritten policy. If [the newspaper's managers are offended] because they've got a grudge, there's nothing. It's a dead issue. And that's wrong.

According to respondents, story avoidance is not always a conscious decision. The editor cited in the section addressing recusal, who had a personal friendship with a local judge, said one of the reasons he tries to recuse himself from any stories that involve his friend is because he's afraid that he may subconsciously suppress news involving his friend: "I don't know as I would purposely do it, but subconsciously I might not pursue something as much if he was involved because I would almost be fearful of what it would do for that friendship."

However, respondents said that when an article is intentionally ignored or slanted, it can sometimes be difficult for journalists in leadership positions to know when unethical conduct has transpired. One editor at a daily newspaper indicated that article suppression is not always obvious, especially because his newspaper and town are large enough that it becomes difficult for editors and publishers to monitor everything that occurs:

> *Excerpt 30:* I think when that happens, it's very quietly done and you don't even really hear about what it was they were protecting [the source] from because [the source] protected them. [Reporters] know about this, and they don't act in the way they would had they heard about it involving someone else.

Respondents said before reporters reports even reach the point where might they avoid or attempt to suppress a story, they could possible allow personal relationships to cloud their journalistic judgment—especially in instances where a journalist finds him- or herself denying that a friend might be capable of committing a crime.

According to one editor of a weekly newspaper, it is possible that reporters will simply refuse to believe that a friend or acquaintance is capable of behaving in a criminal or unethical manner, despite the facts presented by other sources or law enforcement officials. He spoke of a colleague, in a previous job situation in another state, who had to removed from an article

because she could not believe or accurately report the charges against a person whom she knew personally:

> *Excerpt 31:* You can choose not to believe what's going on with somebody, or you can think, "The clerk is a nice person. They would never embezzle. Maybe they just borrowed money for gas and meant to give it back Monday."

The rule that would seem to emerge from these discussions is that every article should be treated with the same professional manner, and in accordance with established professional ethics and standards. If journalists cannot do that, they should not be working on a story that would drive the reporter to violate said standards and ethics.

Ethical dilemmas. Changes in behavior are not the only ethical dilemmas that respondents reported when they addressed possibility that community journalists might become too involved with sources or community groups. A host of ethical issues and ideas emerged from analysis of data: advertising and sponsorship, friend or source expectations and pressure, favors, bias, conflicts of interest, agendas, and a "line" that reporters might recognize and cross that demarks acceptable professional behavior. The next section will discuss many of these ideas in detail.

Advertising and sponsorship. Because most of the respondents work in smaller towns, many of the weekly newspapers in question could face the added dilemma of risking their business model should one of their advertisers become angered by unfavorable news coverage. Likewise, in a small community, both daily and weekly newspapers often sponsor events in the community. Issues of advertising and sponsorship were not discussed in detail by all of the respondents because it was not one of the main questions of the interview process, but some of the respondents independently brought up monetary concerns during their interviews.

One publisher of a small-town weekly lamented that his organization, by nature of the demographics of his town, has a much more limited advertising base than a major metropolitan newspaper. He said that although he believes his company would never succumb to pressure from advertisers, he must always acknowledge that by offending one of his large advertisers he runs the risk of severely damaging the company's revenue streams. He added that a sister newspaper owned by the same company had reported on a criminal case involving family members of one the newspaper's most vital advertising businesses. In response, the owner of the business pulled all of his advertising from the newspaper: "You know it was the biggest customer they had, how do you do that?" The publisher said he did not believe his biggest advertiser would "get into trouble with the law," and that he doubted he would ever have to report on a criminal case involving him. However, if it did happen, it could be severely damaging:

> *Excerpt 32:* I doubt that would ever happen, but if it did, we'd have to report on it. We could lose all that business. It would destroy our newspaper. What do you do? It's one of those things you've got to think of as a small-town publisher that is difficult to deal with.

The editor of the same newspaper also acknowledged his company's smaller advertising base, but he said that he didn't think the newspaper would bow to pressure from advertisers. Still, he noted, the possibility of offending advertisers is a dilemma of which community journalists must be cognizant.

While editors at the daily newspapers likely have enough staff to keep the editorial and advertising sides separate, that is not a luxury that all weekly newspapers can afford. At least two of the newspapers included in this study had publishers who worked on both the business and editorial side of the newspaper, and one newspaper had an employee who worked mostly on the

advertising side but also wrote for the newspaper. The publisher of that publication said he is careful not to allow this reporter to cover a lot of "hard news." He is mostly used for features and to cover an outlying town—of which he is a resident. The reporter said he recognized the conflict and said he always makes it a point never to cover someone to whom he sells advertising. He tries "very hard to be ethical," but acknowledged that it is not an easy thing to balance:

> *Excerpt 33:* The media is an incredibly tough job to make a living at, it really is, especially in a rural area, and so that's something I've had to learn to do. But man, it's hard. It really is hard, and when you add money into the mix of what I just talked about, it becomes even more difficult. So I try very hard not to cover anybody on anything that's not complete fluff, if I deal to them—if I sell to them at all.

Community newspapers are also often involved in sponsoring events to help promote community causes and values. In fact, on the day that interviews were conducted for this study at one publication, the newspaper in question was sponsoring a barbecue for a local youth organization. This organization was one in which one of the newspaper's reporters was heavily involved. The editor of the newspaper stated that the newspaper sponsors a community fundraiser on a quarterly basis. This time, management had decided to sponsor an event to raise money for the youth organization and invited the community to come take part. However, because the newspaper was sponsoring the event, the editor decided, after much discussion with the reporter who was involved in the group, that it would be difficult to justify placing a story about the fundraiser in a prominent section of the newspaper. He settled on having the reporter write a column: "Even then, we carefully mapped out what can he get into, and we decided to focus on his personal experiences with the program—not some high-level great things about this organization."

Ethical dilemmas arise, therefore, as journalists contemplate how to balance coverage of events that they themselves sponsor. Respondents said that establishing balance can be difficult, especially because the community may view any of sponsored events as inappropriate—even if the publication would have covered the event regardless of company's sponsorship of it. One reporter believed that sponsorship of events actually harmed her newspaper's credibility in in the community. She said that some members of the community believe that the publication only covered certain events because it was sponsoring them:

> *Excerpt 34:* There's more times than I can count that the newspaper has sponsored an event that we've also covered it. Sometimes I don't know if we would have covered it had we not sponsored it. . . . I think people wonder about that, and they wonder about the credibility, and they think, "Oh they only did that because [they] sponsored it."

Advertising and sponsorship seems to raise distinct ethical dilemmas in small towns because each advertiser may carry more weight. These issues seem to be on the minds of the respondents because the dilemmas were raised independently of the questions asked in this study. For journalists who were interviewed for this study, however, it seems that respondents are unwilling to compromise their standards—at least not openly—when it comes to advertising or sponsorship.

Source expectation, pressure, agendas, and favors. Respondents said they believed a heavily community-involved reporter could face an inability to remain objective should a friend approach him or her in search of a favor. Likewise, respondents said they were nervous about friends who would come to them and attempt to push an agenda, or about reporters who might be so concerned about or involved in a friendship that he or she is blinded to the agenda of the friend. One editor said the credibility of a newspaper could be harmed any time "you put

yourself in a position where somebody believes there's a favor given." The following excerpts detail similar fears of other journalists who were interviewed:

> *Excerpt 35:* You could probably get sucked into what they want you to print and what they want people to know.
>
> *Excerpt 36:* The more people you know, and the more buddy-buddy you are with the people in the community, the harder it will be report, to do our jobs. It's unfortunate. It sounds terrible. It sounds like you're a meanie who doesn't want to make any friends. But the more friends you have, the more problems that are going to come up for you when those friends either get in trouble or want something.
>
> *Excerpt 37:* If you were good friends with the mayor, and he slips you all this information telling you what's going on, people could probably say that's a problem because maybe he's only slipping you the good information, and he's trying to hide things or he's trying to put a damper on other people.

One editor, who had spent considerable time working for his current small-town paper, indicated that, several decades before, the publisher of the newspaper would often force the editorial staff to write about the publisher's friends "because one friend or another needed something in the paper or wanted to have his ego stroked." That bothered the editor, but he was grateful that his current publisher did not ask him to cater to his friends.

A journalist at a daily newspaper said she often had friends who knew she was a reporter and who misunderstood the nature of her job. As such, when friends approached her to press an agenda, such as how the city "is screwing me over with my utility refund," she said occasionally those friends come to her and ask her to do a story: "They have every right to, but whether or not it's a real issue that needs to be discussed on a whole citywide level, eh, that's another matter."

Having to balance friends' and sources' expectations becomes difficult when that friend decides he or she wants something in exchange for the relationship, many of the respondents said. This is especially difficult, according to one reporter who worked for a newspaper in his hometown, because most people understand the power and reach of the community newspaper and its ability to spread information and sway opinions:

> *Excerpt 38:* Sometimes they just want to catch ahold of that and say, "You're going to write what I want you to write." And that would be my only concern—that sometimes when you're a part of that organization, you kind of get too close to everything, to the point where you make it your agenda to make sure everything gets said about that group.

Another concern raised by several respondents comes with reporters who have not been trained in journalistic norms—especially, perhaps, for newspapers who rely heavily on contributors, as many small-town weeklies are forced to do. This lack of formal training proves difficult because an untrained contributor will likely have relationships outside of the newsroom by nature of their limited involvement in the profession. Likewise, someone who has not been formally trained by either a journalism school or through prolonged experience in the field may not be aware of the ethical norms established by journalistic organizations. An editor of a weekly that has some reporters who were not formerly trained as journalists said she once had a reporter "roped into doing a story because of the organization they were friends with." The leadership of the organization spelled out to the reporter how the story should be written.

> *Excerpt 39:* This person bought into it and [the story] ran, and we looked like idiots when the truth came out that it was a total agenda push. And it wasn't us. It wasn't our opinion. It was the [group's] opinion but it made it look like it was our opinion.

Perhaps an untrained journalist such as the one mentioned in the previous excerpt may not understand the consequences of an "agenda push." But it would appear that the editors interviewed for this study understood that the voice of the reporter is often seen as the voice of the newspaper. So, in cases like the excerpt when a reporter's coverage is compromised, it reflects negatively on a community newspaper.

Bias. This same small-town editor also said that community journalists need to not only be careful not to push agendas of their friends and acquaintances, they also must show caution in pursuing their own interests. By pursuing personal interests, an individual might risk harming the newspaper's relationship with the community. One editor mentioned a previous employee who was "out to get the community" and was often found "trying to catch people in their tracks." As a result, the journalists who filled his position after the journalist in question left the paper faced a public that was uncooperative.

Bias threatens the perceived objectivity of reporters, and therefore can hinder a journalist's sense of professionalism, a good portion of interview subjects indicated. Respondents shared the following excerpts concerning bias from journalists who grow too close to sources or community organizations.

> *Excerpt 40:* They can get too involved, and they can't write an objective story when that story needs to be written.
>
> *Excerpt 41:* I've known some people who have very good, very good sources and are very sympathetic to people on the social services side of things. [Who] would tend to write their stories favoring that kind of thing.

A publisher of a weekly newspaper, while stressing throughout his interview that objectivity is an ideal toward which all community journalists should strive, did seem to indicate

that, to some extent, bias is inevitable for reporters because it is human nature to adjudicate and categorize and that bias "formulates itself in the kinds of questions somebody chooses to ask." If bias is inevitable, as the publisher suggested, it would certainly affect the credibility of a community newspaper. However, as mentioned previously, many respondents believed the appearance and perception of bias could be avoided by providing balanced and accurate information.

Conflicts of interest, perceived impropriety, and "the line." In almost all of the 15 interviews conducted for this research, the biggest fear expressed by respondents in getting too involved with a story, source, or community group revolved around their ability to weather conflicts of interest. Their expressed concerns included reporters who place the needs of their friends or acquaintances above the needs of the community that the newspaper serves. Likewise, respondents said it could become awkward for organizations or sources when a reporter who has committed to a friendship or a cost works for a newspaper that is forced to provide negative coverage—or editorials—about those groups.

> *Excerpt 42:* It could create a conflict if you are a part of an organization or a movement that the editorial board editorializes against for the very paper that you work for. If I'm going to Planned Parenthood parties, and I'm a supporter of that [organization] outside of the newsroom, and then we write an editorial saying Congress should cut all funding for Planned Parenthood, I might feel weird going back and participating in that group.

While some representatives of the some of the newspapers used in this study permitted their employees to become involved with community organizations, one of the ways respondents suggested that reporters could avoid conflicts would be to have only surface relationships with those organizations. In essence, a reporter would not take on leadership positions within the

group. One editor suggested avoiding "boards that we might end up covering" so that a journalist is not influencing the news with his or her involvement.

The expressed fear of avoiding conflicts was especially prevalent when respondents discussed a journalist's membership in community organizations. While community journalism professionals did not unilaterally agree whether reporters should get involved in clubs or other community groups, almost all said that a reporter should not cover a group in which they were intimately involved. Likewise, while some reporters admitted that they had interviewed friends or acquaintances for stories, almost all of the professionals interviewed said they believed if a story was important, and a reporter had a friend involved in it in some way, he or she should remove him- or herself from covering it. According to one editor: "It's just a huge pain if the organization has a pipeline into your newsroom and thinks they can get more coverage, and then if they do get more coverage, how are you going to defend that to the other groups?"

One reporter said that even if a particular professional's beat coverage does not involve a group or friend, journalists should be careful with whom and what they associate because occasionally reporters are asked to help out with a story "outside your parameters."

For many of the respondents, if there was even the possibility that the public may perceive a conflict of interest—regardless of the truth in the matter—it was enough for the paper's management to suggest a reporter avoid contact with or coverage of that individual or group. Otherwise, the public would also struggle to see the reporter as being objective in unrelated stories. As one reporter said: "A perceived conflict of interest is maybe not just as bad, but it could be as big of a problem as actual conflicts of interest. It's about maintaining that credibility."

The journalists who were interviewed in this study were greatly concerned with their credibility, and as such, concerned with the public's perceiving impropriety in their news coverage. One editor said that even in a benign situation, such as a resident seeing a reporter having coffee with the mayor to discuss city issues—even if the contact with the mayor was happenstance—that fleeting impression of impropriety could forever taint the public's perception of a story:

> *Excerpt 43:* Some outsider may read your byline and say, "Oh well, he has coffee with the mayor every Saturday, and he's going to paint the city in a rosy light just because they're good friends." You really can't control people's opinions of you, so you have to let the work do that. Hopefully, your work will be objective. Anybody can see it. But the casual observer may think you're slanted even if you're not—even if you try specifically not to be because you know the person.

The source of the previous excerpt said he once dated a woman who worked at city hall, so he decided he couldn't write articles concerning City Hall because he was afraid that even if he was objective, people would think he was slanted because of his personal relationships. In general, the journalists who were interviewed seemed to be greatly concerned about the public's perception of possible impropriety. According to one publisher, the danger of setting a precedent for the public to misinterpret a reporter's impartiality extends even to columns written for opinion sections—even when they're clearly marked as an editorial:

> *Excerpt 44:* When you do that, people are going to read your stories differently. Let's say you went out and said everybody should be armed—there should be a law where everybody should carry a gun. Everybody's going to look to see how right wing you are about everything else in your stories now.

Community journalists interviewed for this study said they did not think that having a relationship with a source or an organization necessarily hurt their impartiality, but they believed that if the public were to perceive of an impropriety, just that perception of impropriety would hurt the credibility of a reporter—and, by extension, the credibility of a newspaper.

When it came to balancing the public's perception of a reporter's credibility and objectivity as it involves personal relationships, journalists referred often to a "line" that they should not cross as professionals. Some of the journalists who were interviewed believed that they would recognize the line before they crossed it, but one cited a "slippery slope" that a reporter might approach were he or she to become too close to a source. As another reporter said, having personal relationships with sources in the community "could make that line a lot easier to cross."

However, there is always a concept of reality that must be explored—and will be in the next section. Though reporters and editors ideally are open about their relationships and ethical in the way they manage them, it may not be realistic to expect them to altogether avoid relationships with sources. Journalists are bound to have some extracurricular contact with people in the community, especially when the community is as small as some of the areas in which these interviews were conducted. One editor of a daily newspaper believed that it was unrealistic to limit reporters in their personal relationships:

> *Excerpt 45:* I don't think it's realistic to say you shouldn't have any kind of personal relationships—which is what we were taught when I was in school—because the reality is the way the world is now, you have to know some people to know what's going on within your beat. That means maintaining a professional relationship, but as far as friends and buddies, that's a little different.

That idea of reality leads to a final set of ethical dilemmas that community journalists face: balancing community expectations of coverage with the need to make money and inform the public, and facing a reality that idealized journalistic practices may not always be possible—especially in small, short-handed newsrooms.

Community expectations and reality. Community journalists often serve a public that takes some ownership in the paper and that led some of the respondents to lament that often they had to balance the community's expectations for coverage with what they saw as their duty to report the truth. This conflict often demands that reporters go out of their way to report positive news, or to cover issues that may not seem as prominent as others because the public demands those issues receive attention. One publisher, as well as a couple of editors hinted that the public prefers positive news—mostly local issues— and that community members sometimes expressed a desire to dictate what the newspaper covers. Said one reporter, "I think a lot of people view the newspaper as like the government entity and they should be able to determine what we put in it and how we go about everything."

As an example of this sentiment, one editor described three classifications of readers that he used to describe what the community believed the newspaper should cover. First, he said, there is the segment of the population that believes the newspaper is a "scrapbook service." Basically, this section of the community believes the newspaper's function serves mostly to highlight faces in the community and members of this group want to "see their grandchildren's picture in there." Another group wants to be informed about local issues and their effects on the community. Finally, there are people who "thrive on the death and mayhem and disaster reporting" of accidents, deaths, and crime. "Basically if you just want to make yourself a well-rounded newspaper, you're going to have something for everybody in there," he said.

It is therefore essential for a community publication to balance its efforts between informing the community and giving readers what they want. Community journalists who were interviewed for this study said they share a desire to be "useful" but also to cover important issues about which the public needs to be informed. Most importantly, community journalists need to focus on local issues—especially as that is their niche because larger newspapers do not tend to cover some of the smaller towns in detail. The following excerpts share more of the journalists' thoughts on balancing coverage with community expectations:

> *Excerpt 46:* People in these more isolated communities kind of depend on the newspapers to [report] what's going on here, so we have to balance what's going on community-wise versus what is actual news and what they need to hear.
>
> *Excerpt 47:* You're down in the lives of the people, and there's by far more good going on in the community than bad. There's a heck of a lot more people that took a meal over to the sick last night than how many banks were robbed yesterday, and yet [most] newspapers seem to only be able to figure out the negative side.

Another reality that community newspapers face is a lack of manpower. Already facing smaller newsrooms than larger publications out of sheer necessity, they also now face a climate of shrinking news staffs because of the struggling economy, a surge in online readers, and other external business factors. To one reporter, finding the "stories that matter" is the most difficult balance for any newspaper, especially in an era of declining newsrooms and shrinking news staff, and she doesn't think the newspaper can always get out to cover every story. Despite her privately held journalistic ideals of objectivity and detachment, she believes that since the reporters "can't be everywhere," reality dictates that writers have good enough relationships with people in order to get information. For example, on a particularly busy day involving multiple

breaking news stories, the reporter's grandparents, who live in the area, informed her of a car accident that she may have missed because she was focused on other articles:

> *Excerpt 48:* I think that it's really difficult sometimes, especially because generally a person's spectrum is just this little bubble. They've got their friends, their family, their church, whatever their organizations that they're involved in, and that's just a portion of what really is an issue here in the community. And because there's only a couple of us as reporters, I don't think that we can cover every single aspect of that.

When a community publication faces a shortage in reporters, although recusal from a story involving a source with which a reporter has a personal relationship may be ideal, it is not always realistic. One newspaper editor noted that he only had one other full-time colleague in the newsroom—and if there were an issue, it would be difficult to find a way to remove a reporter from a news story. That makes it a necessity for reporters to "do a little bit of everything," according to another editor.

Even with shorthanded news staffs, community journalists in management positions may be either unable or unwilling to micromanage their reporters' relationships and involvement away from the office. One publisher said he doesn't even bother having any policies to manage how his reporters live their personal lives because it's not possible, even at a small newspaper, to stop people from getting involved with sources and organizations. He simply appeals to their journalism training and their knowledge of ethical norms and hopes they are professional.

Another reality that community journalists face is the human element in their reporters. Journalism as a profession may have idealistic standards, but it would seem that community journalists do not believe that all cases and situations are equal and should be handled in the same manner. One journalist at a daily newspaper noted that reporters are "not robots. We'll

always have an opinion on anything we cover." An assistant editor at a weekly paper agreed, asking whether it was even possible to "separate personal feelings" from professional practice.

Finally, despite the idealistic professional expectations of informing the community as the Fourth Estate, the reality remains that community newspapers are businesses—and businesses have to make money to operate. Therefore, they may be able to stress objectivity, detachment, and public need as worthy goals for which employees should strive, but in the end, if circulation or advertising revenue drop, they will go out of business. One publisher was asked by a member of the community why his newspaper prints so many pictures of schoolchildren instead of spending the majority of the newspaper's resources on investigative reporting or on reporting crimes committed in the area. His response was simple, but it stressed his desire to stay in business:

> *Excerpt 49:* Because as a businessman I know that newspapers sell because people want to put the picture of their kid on the refrigerator. And I'm not doing it just for that—that's part of the community involvement—but the more faces I have, the better off we are. . . . People in the community, it's nice that they perceive that the newspaper as theirs, but on the other hand, they also have to understand that it is a business, and that it also has to make money.

The conflict between professional and emotional responses to ethical dilemmas has answered parts of the first two research questions—involving ethical decisions. The next section will also explore ethical issues involving the balance between community involvement and detachment.

Community Involvement and Detachment

The next sections will address the balance between involvement and detachment and how journalists described how they should handle friendships, their involvement in community organizations—especially the LDS Church—and what advantages there are for both involvement and detachment. Although not all community journalists interviewed for this study were heavily involved in the community, most expressed a wide variety of advantages to involvement, most of which involved source development and information. Debate about involvement and detachment also extended to the role of the reporter in the article or in coverage of an event or issue. A handful of community journalists who were interviewed said that they believed the role of the reporter is to be an unbiased observer. One publisher, however, strongly suggested that journalists should help the community by becoming actively involved in governing processes. The following sections will discuss many of the themes—beginning with friendship—that arose from analysis concerning involvement and detachment in community life and processes.

Friendship. Respondents had varying opinions on whether it was appropriate for journalists to be friends with sources. Some seemed to indicate such relationships were inevitable. Others said they believed friendship between writers and sources were likely but journalist did not actively seek it. Finally, others said they believed involvement to be unethical and a practice that should be avoided at all costs.

The first group, those who believe friendships with sources are inevitable, saw them develop in various ways. One editor of a weekly said that she becomes friends with many of her sources after writing articles, but she tries to only use people with whom she has a previous relationship in the case of "soft news." However, many journalists who had extended backgrounds in their community were likely to have relationships with people and organizations—even government sources—before even beginning coverage of a beat or story.

One publisher who was native to his area said that he knows everyone involved in local government because he "grew up with these guys" and: "There's only 10,000 people that live in [this area]. You're going to know quite a few of those just by being a member of this community."

Managing those relationships is not always easy for community journalists who are native to their coverage area. For one editor, who has had a lifelong relationship with two city council members, even covering city government sometimes requires balance. One of the council members in question was one of the journalist's football coaches in high school. Another helped the editor's family to become actively engaged in the LDS Church. According to the editor, his two friends on the council do not have positive feelings toward each other, and they often try to use their relationship with the journalist to try and slip anonymous detrimental information about the other—much to the editor's chagrin. Such a difficult dilemma perfectly exemplifies many of the ethical discussions about having relationships with local government sources. The editor in the middle of this power struggle suggests balance by transparency, noting that when one of the two council members in his acquaintance tries to get him to write an expose about the other, he tells them he will only do the articles on the record.

There may be other ways to foster positive relationships within the community without compromising journalistic standards. Many of the journalists interviewed in this study felt it was inappropriate for a reporter to form personal relationships with sources. However, in order to do their jobs, the respondents acknowledged that it was vital for them to be on good terms with community members. As such, respondents often suggested that community journalists must cultivate more of a cordial acquaintance relationship to remain informed but objective in the

community. More than one journalist used an "arm's length" analogy to discuss the nature of a proper relationship between a source-reporter relationship:

> *Excerpt 50:* A good rule of thumb would be what's called, the arm's length. You don't want to be in an intimate relationship, not necessarily physical, but in an intimate friendship relationship with a source. On the other hand, you don't want to be unfriendly.
>
> *Excerpt 51:* I have not in my career ever established a close relationship with any government official. I've been very cordial; I've been to lunch with them—you know go out for coffee every now and then, "say hi,"—but to be very close friends, I've never had that kind of relationship with these people around here that I cover.

A later section of this research will discuss the advantages inherent to having cordial relationships with the community. But from the suggestions of the respondents, it does not appear necessary to become involved in groups or to become friends in order to have a good relationship with sources. It is possible, instead, to maintain a professional distance while still caring enough about sources to treat them with respect and in a cordial manner.

Finally, there were those respondents who believed it was inappropriate for any reporter to become involved with any source on a personal level. For these journalists, it was a compromise of their ethical standards to develop friendships in the community. As such, they avoided contact at all costs in order to maintain that professional distance. Most of the reporters who shared this point of view seemed to direct it toward sources. One editor, however, suggested he thought journalists in general should not have many close friends at all—even those who were not necessarily involved in a reporter's beat—because it was only a matter of time before things became difficult in their relationships:

> *Excerpt 52:* I have very few friends. I don't seek out friendships. And when I do make a friend, I worry a lot about when's this going to come back to haunt me—when they're even going to either want coverage in a certain way, or when someone they know is in trouble or they're in trouble and you have to report on it.

This editor's view appeared to be in the minority. In general, journalists believed it was not appropriate to cover friends or form personal relationships with sources, but they also didn't think it was a good idea to remain aloof. They felt it necessary to form cordial relationships with those they cover, while also seeking out ties to the community in other ways in order to broaden their horizons and understand community life.

Political involvement. Although none of the six newspapers studied in this thesis had any official policies to regulate a journalist's membership in community organizations or relationships with friends, one official policy that was addressed universally in interviews—often spontaneously—concerned political involvement. The general rule seemed to be that reporters and editors should not run for office or become involved in political campaigns, and that the newspaper itself should remain unbiased in its coverage of local candidates and political issues. However, respondents had a more diverse view on how personally involved an individual might otherwise ethically become politically involved. Few general practices emerged, with some editors stressing it was a civic duty for reporters to be involved, and still others suggesting that it was unethical for a reporter to participate any kind of political behavior that went beyond basic voting.

Several journalists in management positions who were interviewed in this study expressed the policy that their reporters were not allowed to run for office under any circumstance. A handful of editors said they discouraged their reporters from caucusing or

joining political parties. One newspaper publisher said he didn't care what kind of political activities his reporters engaged in as long as it didn't compromise their ability to report. At one newspaper, the editor stressed the belief that reporters should vote because it's their civic duty. And at another, the publisher had served on the city council because he believed it would help him better understand the political process.

In addition to not running for office, one universal thought seemed to be that political advocacy in news reporting is inappropriate, unless such advocacy is confined to opinion sections of the newspaper. But otherwise journalists' ideas of political involvement varied. For some, the ideal involved open support of political processes, and for others it seemed to be pure detachment and observation.

One editor stated that he did not want his employees "up-front" in any political group or issue, although he would "not have any problem with people voting." Both of his reporters immediately declared political activity as inappropriate when asked whether their newspaper had any policies governing community involvement:

> *Excerpt 53:* They don't want you to start spewing forth one way or the other or going out and pushing for somebody.
>
> *Excerpt 54:* We cannot be viewed as supporters of some political cause, whether it's some kind of activity in front of the courthouse, a gathering, a protest about legalizing marijuana, or whatever.

However, there was a shared sentiment among many of the respondents that if a reporter was not currently covering the story—and especially if they did not work in an area of the newspaper that covers politics—that political involvement would not be a violation of ethical standards. One reporter at a community daily believed the only time a reporter should get openly

involved in political activity would be if he or she is on a beat, such as sports, that would never involve political activity. She hinted that it would be appropriate for a journalist to express political opinions only if he or she were doing so in a private setting:

> *Excerpt 55:* When you go home at night, and you're talking over dinner about politics, and what's going on in the news, then I think that's fine. But I think that because the majority of us at one point or another ends up covering a political story, I think it's really important to remain unbiased.

However, not all of the respondents believed political activity to be inappropriate behavior for journalists. One editor strongly suggested that although his newspaper could limit an employee's participation on campaigns or ability to run for office, he believed that it was not appropriate for an editor to tell reporters that they cannot vote or caucus—because such a prohibition would prevent the employee from performing a civic duty. Barring reporters from all political processes would disenfranchise them—and hurt the community. However, he said he did not believe that reporters should stray into advocacy or allow their involvement to reflect poorly on the newspaper:

> *Excerpt 56:* I actually had an editor, one time, tell me that you really shouldn't vote because that impacts the way the news happens. No. You're an American, too. You can vote. They don't have to check their citizenship at the door. If they want to vote, great. . . . I have no say in that because that's them doing what they believe to be their civic duty, and that's not for me to say should somebody be involved in political issue A or B.

What the editor did suggest was that his reporters remember that, because they are public figures and people do know they work for the newspaper, journalists should remember that they are representing the publication and be cognizant of that fact when engaging in political activity.

One editor suggested that he didn't openly support any candidates in his reporting but did not mind voicing an opinion if asked directly: "I'm not afraid to say who I'm voting for and why they should have the job, but I always give them a reason."

One indication from several respondents showed that perhaps political activity would be permissible if community journalists refrained from participating in local campaigns or issues. Respondents were more interested in affecting in affecting local issues. Some respondents indicated they believed participating in national issues would not cause ethical dilemmas because a reported would not address it in his or her news coverage.

> *Excerpt 57:* Something [locally] people would be involved in, like energy would probably be the biggest one out here. I wouldn't want my reporters holding picket signs. But if it's "Save the Swamp" in Florida, that's fine.
>
> *Excerpt 58:* If he's taking part in a political protest in [a bigger city], that's not here. That's someplace else. That's not anything that he's going to be expected to cover down here. So, yeah, go ahead and express yourself.

Political involvement appears to be a significant ethical concern for community journalists—especially because many of them play a prominent role as a community voice. Journalists interviewed for this study believed their coverage should not be compromised by their becoming too involved in a campaign or a particular issue.

Participation, observation, and the "greater good." Another ethical political dilemma faced by some community journalists is the idea of participation versus observation. Should a reporter speak up in meetings, potentially affecting the outcome of a report they are covering for the newspaper? Should they remain a passive observer who is present only to inform, not to affect? Most of the respondents who were interviewed believed the answer to be the latter: Even

in small towns, at community newspaper a journalist is expected to stay aloof of the issues and discussion and remain an inactive observer who seeks to inform the public.

Many respondents acknowledged that detached observation was not easy. Many of the issues discussed by local governments that these journalists cover also affect the reporters directly because they often live in the towns that they cover. One reporter said that he sometimes had to interview school district personnel who helped educate his daughter. Because the issues upon which city leaders are voting not only affect the reporter but the community in general, one publisher suggested that—despite his staff's arguments to the contrary—he believed his reporters should not be afraid to speak up in meetings and share information with city leaders to help them make important decisions.

> *Excerpt 59:* You know what, these people are volunteers. They come in and they serve on these councils. They're not full time. They've got families at home, they've got businesses to run, they can't go to all the meetings that they're supposed to be to, and they're trying to make good decisions with the knowledge that they have. So why not help them out? . . . You just can't report the news and be a part of the decision-making process. You've got to be able to report, but you've also got to be able to be accepted in that process and be an active participant in the process.

However, out of the 15 interviews conducted for this study, that publisher was the only community journalism professional that openly opined that a journalist should be a part of community processes. Contrarily, most respondents who addressed community processes—although not all interviewees commented on the issue—stated that the job of a journalist is not to be an active participant in politics or community processes. Instead he or she should be a passive observer who is there to report the news:

Excerpt 60: I would tend to stay back and just observe everything instead of taking part in it. I always felt that's a better way for me to take down everything that's going on and just to hear what people have to say instead of just getting involved in it myself.

Excerpt 61: You know that they're discussing your water rights or they're discussing your water source, and you can't say anything because you're supposed to observe. It's difficult, but you have to stick by that, so I don't say anything.

One place where most respondents did seem comfortable being involved in a process was in informing members of the public about issues that served the "greater good." For example, one editor of a daily newspaper spoke of a series his newspaper worked on with a local hospital that was meant to inform women about breast cancer and how mammograms decrease the risk of fatalities. After releasing the series of articles, the editor said, the area went from "being the worst county in the entire state per capita of women who got mammograms to the third best." According to the editor, four women used the series as inspiration to get tested and found out that they had cancer in an early enough stage to get treatment: "We legitimately helped people and saved lives. And that makes you feel pretty good about things at the end of the day."

LDS Church. Many of the cities in which these interviews were conducted have strong ties to and large populations of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). In four of the six cities, journalists stated that the LDS church has a large population and indicated it had a strong influence on community life. Even the two other towns, though they did not boast a heavily Mormon population, still had significant enough LDS populations that the members of the church have a significant role in community life—even if they do not dominate it.

As such, at many of these newspapers, it is possible that reporters who are Mormon may have to cover LDS issues that may make journalists somewhat uncomfortable. From a young age, many LDS Church members see being a Mormon as a major part of their identity (Nelson, 2003). Some scholars have noted that specific regions of the United States, mostly Utah, but also including Idaho and Arizona, constitute a subculture of Mormonism (Toney, Keller & Hunter, 2003; Vogt, 1956). Toney et. al found that what they call the "Mormon Cultural Region" remained its own distinctive region from 1950 to 1990. In 1956, Vogt argued that part of Mormon culture included community-mindedness: "The expectations among Mormons are such that one must show his fellows or at least convince himself that he has good cause for *not* committing his time and resources to community effort" (p. 1168). He also argued that church leaders, both past and present, were looked upon by members as "cultural heroes" (p. 1170). Likewise, Nelson (2003) noted that young members are taught to be less "self-oriented" than similar surveyed non-Mormons from across the nation: "While growing up, young Mormons . . . often receive dual messages: an emphasis on individualism and self-reliance, on the one hand, and the need to focus on others and be part of the group, on the other hand" (p. 45). After she conducted interviews with 28 LDS women, Beaman (2003) wrote that even some of the respondents who had "strayed" from church membership "found themselves defending and protecting their faith, even when they were not active" (p. 68).

With LDS Church membership apparently being a strong part of local culture and identity, perhaps a journalist covering church issues constitute a conflict of interest. However, only one editor and a small handful of reporters who were interviewed expressed concern at the idea of having Mormon journalists covering the LDS Church. The editor was the supervisor of the reporter mentioned earlier in this research who was uncomfortable covering an LDS Church

issue because he was afraid it would jeopardize his standing in the church. “Mormons can’t detach themselves from the church and be reporters if it’s a church issue,” the editor said. He indicated that the LDS Church was a “huge obstacle” for the reporters’ ability to do their jobs because they were afraid to anger church leadership. He indicated that reporters must ask themselves what their “priorities in life” might be and whether membership in a church is more important than their duties as journalists. However, most of the respondents, even those were not LDS, stated that they did not have an issue with LDS reporters covering issues involving the church. In fact, some leaders said they would prefer to have an LDS reporter covering some issues because of the expertise factor. Said one journalist: “There are so many different factual things that go on with the church, there are so many different aspects to it, I think that if you’re familiar with it it’s a lot easier to write about it and do it correctly.” For example, if an article needs to be written about the LDS Church’s policy on succession following the death of a church president, one editor wanted to be sure a reporter knew the process.

Other journalists did not see LDS Church membership as a more significant factor than a reporter’s membership in any other religion. One editor even included other identifying characteristics, such as politics or sexual orientation, and said it was likely that a reporter who was Republican or gay would be just as “biased” in news coverage involving political or social issues because of their personal characteristics as an LDS reporter might be about religious stories. Therefore, as long as a reporter is able to be objective in covering an issue, the editor did not care what church or political party a reporter may claim membership in: “If they do it right, you can’t tell from their work what they are.”

A handful of respondents actually said they had seen bigger objectivity issues with people who were not Mormons covering LDS issues than from those who were members of the church.

Often, according to these respondents, such journalists would go out of their way to try and find something negative to report about the church. One publisher hinted that he had "more trouble with people who want to be muckrakers" than he did with members of the church trying to paint it in an inordinately positive light. Another publisher indicated that many issues that "outsider" reporters have with LDS culture are not only of a religious nature but also politically sensitive. Most residents in his coverage area are conservative, he said, and reporters have as much issue with that as they do with the LDS Church and its members.

> *Excerpt 62:* We're pro-oil and gas, and we're 99% Republican. So, if I hire somebody from Maine, they may complain that it's the LDS culture that they couldn't get along with, but guess what? They couldn't get along with Republicans, and they couldn't get along with a community that wants to drill for oil and gas rather than put up solar panels. And some people just cannot cope with that.

An area where respondents did express some ethical concern was in a situation where an LDS reporter covers a story—especially in the instance of criminal prosecution—involving a member of their congregation or a local leader from their lay ministries. However, as one reporter put it, "really, if I knew the person really well, I have no business reporting on their arrest or conviction" regardless of whether or not he or she was a member of the same local congregation.

Advantages. Most of the respondents saw inherent advantages to community involvement, even if there were disadvantages involved—such as possible conflicts of interest. Respondents listed among the advantages to community involvement the availability of information and story tips, source development and rapport, access, knowledge and understanding, and source credibility.

Probably the most prolific answer involved information and story tips. It was clear that most of the community journalism professionals who were interviewed believed that for a journalist to know what was going on, he or she needed to develop relationships with sources and organizations. Said one editor at a weekly, "I get a lot of my story ideas from just things I do in the community and friends I have." Even the daily newspaper editor who was the most opposed to involvement with sources and community groups saw some possible advantages in the information a journalist could gather.

Respondents said that cordial relationships with community members increased access to sources because of an increase of trust, and with it, as one reporter said, could come sources who are "more candid" in interviews. Journalists who were interviewed believed sources would be more likely to call them with information. Respondents gave several examples that illustrated how—in his opinion—journalists are helped by such connections:

> *Excerpt 63:* There were plenty of times when [because of] your familiarity with sources, they had your cell number. They would call you at 11 at night and say, "Hey there's this thing going down." So you'd go out there, and you'd be the only paper there.
>
> *Excerpt 64:* I feel like I've established myself well here . . . . I can get just about anybody to talk to me about just about anything.

Along with the easy access to sources and story tips comes an understanding of the context and expertise with which that information is given. One editor stated that insider knowledge of a subject or source would only help a reporter to understand "Joe Public who lives down on 300 South." But the editor also said having a reporter with an interest in engineering covering stories about it helps improve reporting. Beyond understanding stories, however, some respondents said they felt that having those connections with the community also helps reporters

understand context surrounding a particular issue: “In a small office, you’re aware of that backstory before you ever find out what just happened.”

Context as an advantage cited by community journalism professionals in the interviews took many forms. One publisher believed that source credibility was a large part of that understanding. As an example, he cited an aforementioned article concerning hazardous materials that a local company wanted to store in his area. The publisher noted a larger, out-of-town metropolitan publication covered the same article and used several sources the publisher said were not credible. One, in particular, he called a “nut.” The larger paper interviewed this questionable source instead of another resident who is also opposed to the plan but whom the publisher believed was far more credible.

> *Excerpt 65:* Those reporters didn’t come to us and say, do you know these people? Well, what do you think of these people? What kind of credible source are they? No. … You didn’t interview [the other source] even though he was opposed. You went and got the guy with the biggest mouth.

Likewise, another editor said that if a journalist is going to cite a source as claiming his neighbor is poisoning his or her well, it’s good to have a longstanding relationship with that person and know that he or she is a credible source. Community journalists live in their communities and some of them spend considerable personal time in an area. Because the respondents have personal ties or experiences in the area, they said they may be able to understand whether a source might be seeking to further his or her own agenda.

In addition to information, context, and access, community journalists saw a handful of other advantages that could be realized by developing personal relationships with sources or becoming members of community organizations. One editor mentioned expertise, hinting that if

he wanted a reporter to write a story involving engineering, it would be beneficial if that reporter had some knowledge of such a complex subject. Another reporter agreed, citing aviation as an example of a story in which it would be beneficial to have knowledge in order to cover a subject. Therefore, some respondents said, membership in a community organization could allow a reporter to know the inner workings of the group, its function, and the role that it serves in the community.

Finally, one of the more often cited advantages to community involvement concerned source development and rapport. In order to get the information necessary for a story, a reporter has to know people in the community and those sources have to know and trust the journalist in question. The journalists interviewed in this study saw source development as a necessary component of their job and believed if they were too detached they wouldn't be able to build trust in the community: "It's as important for them to know that they can trust you. You won't burn them as a source. You won't make them look foolish."

Having examined how community journalists' personal relationships with sources and community organizations affect ethical values, this study has answered the first two research questions. The next section will discuss how community newspaper professionals manage those social ties that they choose to develop and the final section will address what factors may influence a journalist's involvement.

Management

The third research question examined how community journalists manage their social ties in order to maintain professionalism. It would appear from observation and analysis of the interviews that there is no scientific method to the respondents' management styles. However, respondents made several suggestions: good personal judgment, counsel from leadership, picking

and choosing battles, and examining each article on a case-by-case basis based on the importance of the story.

Few of the newspapers had specific policies managing anything but political involvement. One editor, however, said, "we do have a policy of trying to make smart decisions and avoiding conflicts." Personal judgment appeared far more important to many of the respondents than most other management procedures because it allowed them to extend some trust to reporters, believing that the reporter would act in an ethical manner and follow their professional journalism training.

Several reporters shared some of the ways in which they exercised personal judgment. One reporter shared an article in which he had used a friend as a source. He had been employed with at a local hardware store, and he needed to interview somebody who had served on jury duty. He called his friend, who had recently served, and asked him to share his experiences:

> *Excerpt 66:* It might sort of hinge on an ethical dilemma asking my friend who was a juror to participate in my story about jury service. But the approach I took with the story, I judged it as just sort of coincidental and not really impacting the legitimacy of the story in that sense.

Several other respondents shared ideas that related to personal judgment in negotiating gray areas that surround the appropriate use of a friend as a source. One respondent suggested that many journalists are taught certain ethical standards in college, and it is up to their own judgment to decide when to follow them. Another respondent said his management of personal relationships is "not a perfect science. You try to do the right thing."

Though most of the newspaper managers who were interviewed said they tend to defer to their reporters' judgment, most said they believe it is important to counsel their employees when

the reporters share a dilemma with them. One publisher indicated that he closely monitors articles with which there may be an issue. Others said they would often discuss the stories with their reporters to gauge the nature of the conflict:

> *Excerpt 66:* I'd counsel them and say, "Hey, I think this is too close to you, do you mind if I give it to another reporter?" Most of the time they'll say, "Oh no, that's fine."
>
> *Excerpt 67:* You talk about the content; you talk about the questions that are asked; you make sure you review the story. You make sure it's a complete and accurate story, and then you report it.

Among their own exercise of judgment, the respondents said that in order to maintain good relationships with community sources, it was necessary for them to "pick battles" and decide which stories were truly important enough to risk burning a source or friendship. One reporter suggested that such judgment is especially important in sports, where a prominent coach may cut off access if a reporter becomes too aggressive in covering minor issues. "If it's not broke, you know, don't try to act like it's broke," he said. Another reporter, who was native to his area—a town small enough that most of the residents know each other—said it is difficult to continue to gain access if a source is burned, meaning it is important for a reporter to exercise caution by weighing how important the story is: "If you burn down a source in a community this small, odds are they're not going to go away. They're going to be in that position forever, and they're going to affect the people that are in that position forever."

Editors and publishers also tended to include the importance of a story or the prominence of the source as reasons to weigh whether a reporter was too close to a story or beat. Generally speaking, if a friend were a high-ranking government official, it was likely leaders would view a relationship with that person as inappropriate. However, if a reporter wanted to be a member of,

as one publisher suggested, a local sailing club, management did not view that as a staggering conflict of interest:

> *Excerpt 68:* If it's the Planning Commission, I'd say, well, we better be careful with this. You know, would I want one of my editorial staff members a member of the Planning Commission? Probably not.
>
> *Excerpt 69:* To do a story on an upcoming play, there's no conflict of interest really. So what that you support the musical talents of the people that live in [the area]? So, yeah, a story of substance, where the paper is going to be judged on who's covering that article and why, then we make that change.

Bogged down by the number of variables like prominence or story importance, editors tend to believe policies managing community involvement are difficult to implement because there are too many gray areas. Therefore, respondents said that they saw the importance of weighing each article on a case-by-case basis, instead of an all-in-one solution.

Some of the managers who were interviewed said they believed that it is easier at a smaller newspaper to judge each case individually because there are fewer employees and fewer articles to examine. For some of the respondents, the flexibility they have in managing involvement is an advantage that they believe they have over some of the larger newspapers. The flexibility allows them to weigh each case based on its importance and make a decision that is neither rushed nor forced by policy:

> *Excerpt 70:* What's the story about and is this a situation that puts the reporter in an adverse position? You have to look at that one at a time.
>
> *Excerpt 71:* I don't think that you can just sit around and make hard and fast policy that has to be adhered to at all times as it relates to any member of this paper whether

> editorial staff or sales staff or production staff to say, "No you can't be a part of an organization because you work at the paper."

The idea that each situation should be looked at individually is perhaps a good explanation for why the community newspapers where these interviews took place had no official policies for managing community involvement. Perhaps specific policies are more important when editors have less time to adjudicate a situation and fewer resources with which to handle an issue that may arise while dealing with reporters who have conflicts.

This section examined answers to the third research question as to how community journalists manage their personal relationships. The last section of this paper will explore the differences between many of the newspapers and attempt to explain why some journalists chose to become involved in the community—while others preferred to remain aloof.

Sources of Community Involvement

As stated in the results section, there did not seem to be an overwhelming sense of difference between the larger dailies and smaller weeklies in their answers to ethical questions. This leads to a somewhat inconclusive answer to research questions four and five. Most of the differences involved the level of incidental contact journalists have with sources in the community and not necessarily how likely they were to become friends with sources or join community groups. For example, at one of the larger towns, most of the respondents indicated that the city was big enough that they did not often run into sources away from their workplace. In the smaller towns, however, many respondents said they could expect to see people at grocery stores or other places around town.

Another arena where newsroom size seemed to make a difference in the ethical policy espoused by the respondents was the confidence in which leadership believed they could to

discover if a reporter decided to hide a conflict. At one of the larger dailies, the editor lamented that it was likely he wouldn't recognize the conflict until it was too late. However, at two of the weeklies, journalists suggested there was no way of hiding a relationship in a newsroom that small:

> *Excerpt 72:* You can't hide it. It's too little to hide it. It's not like there's 20 reporters working on 40 stories, and you could bury something. You can't bury anything here. And if it looks like you're not covering something, then somebody else will just get assigned to it. It would be very hard to hide anything in a place this small.

Because newspaper size plays such a small role in reasons for community involvement, instead of focusing on simply the differences between sizes, this section will briefly explore a handful of other factors that seemed to affect a journalist's attachment to the community: demographics, roots and ties, formal training, and leadership.

Significant demographics that seemed to arise from analysis of the data included, to a small extent, city population and newspaper circulation, community cultural dynamics, and, as suggested by one editor at a daily paper, the age of the reporter.

Looking at the responses from the interviews, the two larger papers did seem to generally have less involved reporters than the weekly newspapers. However, at one of the larger newspapers involvement was strongly discouraged by the editor, while the other respondent in a leadership position encouraged public involvement as an opportunity for reporters to broaden horizons. Also, at the second newspaper, both reporters who were interviewed were less involved in the community, however, the editor indicated that several of his other reporters, who were unavailable to be interviewed that day, were more likely to be involved—especially in community groups.

Meanwhile, at the four smaller papers represented in this study, there seemed to be varying interest in community involvement, but it also seemed more likely that the respondents from these papers were more connected than respondents at the larger papers. At one of the weeklies, the publisher largely said he stayed out of his reporters' personal lives. At another, the publisher strongly encouraged that his reporters become involved, making friends, joining community groups, and becoming a part of community processes. At a third, involvement was not strongly encouraged or discouraged, but reporters and the publisher did engage in minimal community involvement. At the last paper, a respondent said journalists in leadership positions at his newspaper are heavily involved in community organizations, while he was not—although he had many friends in the community.

The editor at one of the daily newspapers suggested another reason why smaller community newspapers' reporters may not get as involved as one might expect: Age. He contended that because many of these newspapers are the first stop for many reporters, they are in a different age demographic than most of their sources:

> *Excerpt 73:* Those younger folks, they tend not to develop as close of relationships with a source as maybe somebody my age. In other words, their peer group is in this 20-something group. And the majority of their sources are going to be in the 40s and 50s and 60s age group.

Surface observation of this statement, based on demographics of the respondents and their level of community involvements, would seem to indicate that is the case. Most of the younger reporters who were interviewed did not tend to be heavily involved in the community, while it varied among older respondents.

It would stand to reason that journalists who are either native to the area or have been residents for long periods of time would be more likely be involved in the community. This was not universally the case, although it was somewhat true. Reporters who had been in an area a year or less did not have many ties, while an editor who had been in an area slightly longer than 10 years had belonged to a handful of community groups. However, the journalist who was the most vehemently anti-involvement had worked in his current city for more than 20 years. Meanwhile, the three journalists who had lived in their towns for their whole lives had many relationships with sources that were perhaps beyond a professional level.

> *Excerpt 74:* Family, friends. It's rare that I run into somebody in this community that I don't have some knowledge of. It happens on a daily basis. It's rare that a source is someone that I'm meeting for the first time about a story. They're somebody that I know because of something else.
>
> *Excerpt 75:* It's actually been really helpful to know everybody because I already have the relationships, already have the trust built in. . . . It's a real advantage in that aspect.
>
> *Excerpt 76:* The mayors, the city, the chief of police—I can tell you how they were raised. I can tell you what kind of families they came from. I can tell you their quirks, and I can tell you how they're going to react under certain circumstances. I can also tell you whether they'll talk to me or not. And we have the trust built back and forth so that if a government if an official says, "OK, I can't release this yet, but this is why we made this decision." There's a trust there.

Newsroom leadership was a motivating factor, according to statements made by several respondents. For example, once again, the two larger dailies were split on their attitudes toward community involvement, though they were fairly similar in size, production schedule, and

newsroom culture. The editors interviewed at the two papers had vastly different ideas when it came to community involvement. One strongly discouraged community ties, while the other encouraged reporters to get to know people and share a passion with the community. The leadership at the weeklies—with the exception of one publisher who was heavily involved and strongly encouraged involvement though his reporters were not particularly interested in such involvement—were generally hands-off in their expressed attitude toward community involvement. The reporters who were interviewed at those newspapers were somewhat involved but not strongly connected.

Finally, the respondents who had undertaken formal journalism training seemed more reluctant to involve themselves in the community—especially those who had been to journalism school. This, again, was not a universal experience, as one editor who encouraged involvement graduated from a prestigious Midwestern journalism school, while one reporter who had not even been through a basic journalism program was less inclined to join community organizations than the leadership at his newspaper. However, this latter respondent had many sources whom he indicated were friends on a personal level. It should be noted that most of the interview subjects, especially editorial employees, attended journalism school or had been involved in community journalism for an extended period of time. Even the publishers who were community minded believed that their reporters should remain objective and fair in their reporting, regardless of whether they were encouraged to take part in the community.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data collected in the interviews leads the author of this study to propose that there is little generalizability to universally formulate how and why community journalists get involved in the community and how they manage their personal involvement. However, there

are several strong patterns that provide insight into generally held rationales for how and why they get involved—even if not all respondents agreed with this rationale.

First, despite their often heavy involvement with sources and local groups on a personal level, community journalists are still concerned about traditional values of objectivity and detachment. Most are genuinely afraid that their personal involvement in the community could compromise their reporting and that their credibility suffer even if impropriety is only perceived. They recognize the dangers of getting too close to a story—especially as they concern conflicts of interest.

If a respondent thought that his or her reporting—or that of a colleague—might be compromised by a personal relationship, they were willing to suggest a change in reporters in order to recuse themselves from coverage. Though ideal, this policy of strict objectivity is not always possible because of the short-handed nature of the represented newsrooms. However, those who participated in the study said they recognize that it is what should be done. They also believe they can recognize "the line" before they would cross it.

However, in general, the community journalists who were interviewed recognize that there are advantages to community involvement. Most said they believe they can get access and information for articles that would otherwise be missed. They believe they can build trust with sources and better understand the context surrounding a story.

It also appears that the size of a news operation is not necessarily an indicator of how likely community journalists are to become involved in the community. It is much more likely that a combination of demographical factors with a reporters' roots and ties to the community, their formal training, and the attitudes of their direct supervisor that will encourage or discourage them to become involved in the community.

It also would appear that community journalists generally believe they should eschew political activity that takes the form of advocacy, but that they are comfortable with a reporter who is a member of a prevailing faith or political persuasion covering issues involving their personal belief system—as long as the reporter can maintain objectivity in his or her news coverage.

Finally, the management of a reporter's personal relationships with sources and community organizations tends to rely heavily on express counsel from leadership, a weighing of articles on a case-by-case basis examining story importance, and a healthy dose of personal judgment.

Many responses detailed in this study support the social responsibility model of Siebert et al.'s (1956) four theories of the press—especially those detailing professional responses to ethical problems. Most of the journalists interviewed believed it was their moral obligation to discover and report the truth, and many of the respondents believed the only way to do it was follow standard journalistic norms of objectivity and detachment. However, some of the responses, especially those stressing the advantages of community involvement, would seem to support McQuail's (1984) suggestion of the democratic-participant theory of the press. This is especially evident from the publisher who suggested that his reporters become involved in community process, or the editor who strongly believed that voting and caucusing was a reporter's civic duty. Perhaps the current state of community journalism does not fit in total either of these theories, social responsibility or democratic-participant theory, but is a combination of norms and ideals: that it is best for a journalist to be detached from what he or she is are covering and to do so in an objective manner, but that it is still advantageous to

become involved in the community and broaden horizons—especially in matters of which a journalist will not be expected to cover in his or her job.

Other responses indicated that community journalists are aware that they are public figures and that the public lends a certain credence to what they say. As detailed in the review of literature, theories surrounding the agenda-setting function of the media detail that journalists may not have as much sway in forming public opinions as they do in highlighting which issues are important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Respondents seem to understand this power, but most of the worries they shared seemed to deal more with their own integrity, their exercise of it in journalistic fashion, and with the public's perception of it, than with swaying public opinion on what the most important issues might be.

Suggestions for Future Research and Limitations

Based on these observations, this study proposes the following hypotheses for future research:

H1: Community journalists are just as concerned with traditional ethical values as their metropolitan counterparts.

H2: Community journalists understand the potential dangers of community involvement to include conflicts of interest.

H3: Community journalists believe that there are inherent advantages, such as information gathering and source development, to becoming involved in the community.

H4: Community journalists believe that community involvement can be managed by a strong combination of good personal judgment and leadership.

H5: Journalists from smaller weeklies are not more likely to be involved with sources or community organizations on a personal level than journalists from daily community papers.

Because this study was not conducted using a random sample, it is difficult to make any generalizations. This is the largest limitation to the study. Therefore, it is proposed that a future study use a quantitative method to measure the ideas that emerged from this research and closely monitor whether results are similar, allowing researchers to test the hypotheses that have been generated by this study. Perhaps a quantitative survey would also allow for a larger sample size.

There are other limitations to this study. There was a limited engagement, with most of the interviews lasting between 25 and 45 minutes in length. In order to better understand a community journalism dynamic, an ethnography of a couple of community newspapers might better measure whether observations hold true in a natural setting over an extended period of time. These interviews were conducted in a manner that did not adequately explore how a journalist normally responds to personal relationships in his or her own natural environment.

Summary

This thesis explored the involvement of community journalists from small weeklies and larger daily newspapers with sources and community groups. Respondents varied in their level of involvement, but almost all of the respondents said they felt duty bound to conduct their news coverage in an ethical and professional manner. Therefore, while metropolitan and community journalists certainly have disagreements and differences that surround the methods in which each choose to practice the craft, perhaps at the core they have more in common than they would generally admit.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

For Editors or Publishers:
Introductory Questions

1. Please describe the basic demographics of your newspaper, such as circulation, production cycle, and editorial employees.

2. What percentage of your staff has roots in this town or have lived here at least 10 years?

3. How would you describe your town. Would you say there is a close-knit community?

4. How long have you been involved in this newspaper?

5. Was your previous experience in a similar situation as this one?

Main Questions

1. How likely is it for a member of your editorial staff to have personal contact with sources away from the workplace?

2. What kind of policies do you have in place to manage the personal relationships a staff member may have with sources?

3. How do you suggest reporters balance personal relationships with traditional ethics such as objectivity and detachment?

4. Do you know of any cases where a personal relationships have helped or hinder a member of your editorial staff in the production of good journalism?

5. Do you know of any cases where a member of your editorial staff and his/her personal relationships have perhaps gotten in the way of the production of good journalism?

6. In your opinion, what is good and bad about the possibility of a journalist having personal relationships with sources in a community this small?

7. Would you be comfortable with a reporter who is a member of the LDS Church covering a story involving the church? What about a story about a member of their ward or congregation. Why or why not?

8. How do you suggest your reporters be involved in community organizations, such as the PTA, political groups or clubs?

9. Describe your policy for involvement in community organizations. Do you have a policy concerning political activity? Accepting gifts?

10. In what ways would you see community involvement to be in accordance with good journalism practice?

11. In what ways would you consider community involvement to be in conflict with good journalism practice?

12. At what point would you suggest a journalist remove himself/herself from a story that involved sources they may know or organizations to which they belong?

13. What experiences have you had in covering an organization to which you either belonged or had personal relationships with a source who belonged to it?

14. How would you suggest a reporter cover an organization to which they belong (for example, the LDS Church)?

15. Do you believe having personal relationships with sources would help or hinder the watchdog role of journalists? Why?

For Reporters:
Introductory Questions
1. How long have you lived in this area?

2. Do you have any personal ties to the area?

3. Would you consider your community to be close knit?

Main questions
1. How likely is it for you to have personal contact with sources away from the workplace?

2. In what cases have you ever had a personal relationship with a source you have used for a story?

3. How did that help or hinder the production of good journalism?

4. How would you suggest a journalist balance personal relationships with traditional ethics such as objectivity and detachment?

5. In your opinion, what is good and bad about the possibility of a journalist having personal relationships with sources in a community of this size?

6. Are you a member of the LDS Church? If so, with the heavy influence of the LDS Church in these communities, would you feel comfortable covering a story about an issue in which the Church was involved? What about a story about a member of your ward or congregation?

8. To what community organizations, such as church groups, clubs, the PTA or political groups, do you belong?

9. How do you balance membership in community groups with traditional journalism ethics such as objectivity and detachment?

10. In what ways would you see community involvement to be in accordance with good journalism practice?

11. In what ways would you consider community involvement to be in conflict with good journalism practice?

12. At what point would you remove yourself from a story that involved sources they may know or organizations to which you belong?

13. Do you believe having personal relationships with sources would help or hinder the watchdog role of journalists? Why?