

7-2000

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Recommended Citation

Loomis, D. O., A tale of two cities: Do smalltown dailies practice public journalism without knowing it?, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 9, 2000, 132-147.

Available at:<https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss9/10>

A Tale Of Two Cities: Do Smalltown Dailies Practice Public Journalism Without Knowing It?

This case study of two smalltown dailies in North Carolina concludes that small town dailies do practice public journalism without labelling it as such. In one case, the variant of public journalism should more accurately be labeled civic journalism because of an institutionalised and professionalised emphasis on the community's civic life and a de-emphasis of its political life. In the other less vigorous paper, the civic journalism variant is personalised but not institutionalised or professionalised.

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Public journalism, a reform movement in print and broadcast news media, is barely a decade old.¹ But it has generated a mature and robust debate, both within the journalistic profession and among academic researchers.² Much of the debate revolves around the issue of detachment, a professional aloofness rooted in norms of objectivity and credibility. Public journalists assert that this traditional detachment has created a “disconnect” between journalists and the communities they cover, with accompanying losses in the political life of those places.³ Traditional journalists counter that public journalism’s willingness to weaken professional norms of detachment puts news media credibility at risk.⁴ Public journalism’s critics add that such risks are unacceptable to an industry that has seen its audience dwindle in recent decades.⁵

Much study of public journalism⁶ has focused on medium- to large-market daily newspapers that have adopted it. For example, Philip Meyer and Deborah Potter studied public journalism in the 1996 presidential election and examined 20 dailies ranging in circulation from 74,000 to 687,000 with an average size

of 252,000.⁷

The Meyer-Potter study provides much insight into public journalism and its potential effects, but it leaves one aspect unaddressed: Newspapers in smaller communities covering local issues have not been closely examined from a public-journalism perspective.⁸ The omission is important because it is mostly larger metropolitan daily newspapers that worry about a corrosive disconnect between themselves, their readers and their big, complex and growing communities, with results that risk the economic vitality of the newspaper and the political life of the community.⁹

The solution to the disconnect problem may be found in small towns and in answers to the following questions: Does size make a difference? Are reporters and editors at big-city public-journalism papers reinventing what their small-town counterparts have been practising all along? Are reporters and editors in smaller markets practising public journalism and espousing its values without thinking about it?

The questions are important to the study of newspapers' role in efforts to revitalize representative democracy. In his book about public journalism, movement leader Davis "Buzz" Merritt wrote that newspaperman-philosopher Walter Lippmann early this century led many journalists to see themselves as part of an elite, a view that has disconnected them from ordinary citizens.¹⁰ Lippmann's perspective was from the pinnacle of press power in the United States and its largest newspapers as they were reaching peaks of circulation size and global influence. Today, even Merritt's *Wichita Eagle* is in Kansas' largest city and posts a sizable circulation compared to most dailies in North Carolina.

Robert Bellah and other sociologists assert that there are significant differences between big-city and small-town life in contemporary America.¹¹ But newspaper research at the community level has been comparatively rare in part because archived issues of small daily newspaper are not easy to find. The *New York Times* is a newspaper of record thanks in part to an indexing system that has cataloged more than a century of daily editions and distributed the catalog to libraries around the nation.

North Carolina newspapers are a different story. North Carolina is a state of small towns. It publishes more daily newspapers than any other Southern state.¹² The North Carolina Press Association numbers 49 daily newspapers among its membership; 42 of them have circulations of less than 35,000.¹³ Two of those dailies are the focus of this study.

The Rocky Mount (N.C.) *Telegram* and the Salisbury (N.C.) *Post*, however, are neither archived nor cataloged, except at local public libraries, making these smaller dailies comparatively

inaccessible to researchers. But for a study of small town newspapers and how they interact with their communities, these two North Carolina dailies and the communities they serve provide good places to start.

The two dailies were chosen for their circulation size — between 15,000 and 34,999¹⁴ (the middle of three such N.C. Press Association categories) — and for their variation on a measure of editorial vigor.¹⁵ The *Salisbury Post* has won more state press association awards — 43 — during the 1990s than any other newspaper in its circulation category. The Rocky Mount *Telegram*, on the other hand, has won among the fewest — two. The *Post* until 1997 was independently owned by a local family for decades. The *Telegram* has been owned by two distant corporate newspaper chains in succession during the decade.¹⁶

Research Questions

The research questions posed in this study include:

- Is this study's measure of editorial vigour an indicator of predisposition to public journalism?
- Are reporters and editors at small newspapers practising public journalism and espousing its values without labeling or thinking about it?
- Does newspaper and community size make a difference to public journalism?

Method

The focus group is the primary research method employed by this exploratory study of small-town North Carolina newspaper reporters. Editors were interviewed in-depth separately.

In mid-summer 1999 two focus groups were formed, one for each newspaper under study. Participation was determined by purposive sample: The editor at each paper invited three reporters to join the focus group. Each group met in a room at a neutral site, the local public library. Each session lasted about two hours. An audio recording was made of each session, and from each audio tape a transcript was made. Each separate in-depth interview, held in the editor's office immediately following each focus-group session with reporters, also was audiotaped and transcribed.¹⁷ Text analysis of the unstructured data contained in the transcripts included exploring and coding each transcript for ideas, linking common and contrasting themes, and constructing and testing theories about the data. Quotes were extracted to illuminate and exemplify the ideas.

In the reporters' focus groups a discussion "route" was followed in which open-ended questions were asked,¹⁸ while avoiding rigidity along the route,¹⁹ and demographic

questionnaires were filled out. The questionnaires asked information about participants' personal, professional and civic lives, such as place of birth, years worked as a journalist, and memberships in community organizations. The discussion route included questions about public-journalism familiarity, the participant's job and its relationship to the community, the participant's role in the community as a citizen, and the newspaper's role in the community as an institution. Similar questionnaires were filled out and discussion routes followed during in-depth interviews with each editor.

A variant of the purposive sample was the method by which reporters were selected for focus group participation. The method typically involves a participant being invited to bring a friend to the focus group, which has the advantage of making participants more comfortable.²⁰ In this study, an editor was invited to recommend reporters for participation in each group. Since the study focuses on the transmission of organizational culture — professional norms and values held by senior members of the organization and transmitted to new members²¹ — the only criterion editors were asked to apply in their selection of focus group participants was that the group reflect a wide range of experience among reporters, both newcomers and oldtimers. While the method leaves much of the selection process to the discretion of the editor, each editor's prior knowledge of the research topic was limited to its involvement with public journalism.

Data

Data drawn from transcripts of the two focus groups are categorized according to seven abstractions of the participants' observations and ideas. The seven abstract categories are:

- Administrative: concerning organizational management and administration of work-related tasks and duties
- Personal: concerning participants' personal attitudes and beliefs
- Professional: concerning participants' professional norms and practices
- Institutional: concerning the role of the newspaper as community institution
- Cultural: concerning the cultural life of the community in which the newspaper circulates
- Political: concerning the political life of the community in which the newspaper circulates
- Civic: concerning the civic life — the social sphere between the private home and the political life — of the community in which the newspaper circulates.²²

Participants are described numerically throughout the following description, pursuant to the Institutional Review Board-required pledge of confidentiality. Following is a roster of participants from each newspaper:

- Participants One through Three: reporters at *Salisbury Post*
- Participant Four: editor at *The Post*
- Participants Five through Seven: reporters at *The Rocky Mount Telegram*
- Participant Eight: editor at *The Telegram*.

Analysis

Administrative

Both newspapers reported steady turnover in newsroom staff. The Rocky Mount paper, however, appeared to have undergone a dramatic surge, with four departures in one month earlier in the year. The Rocky Mount focus-group turnover discussion led to the issue of longevity of employment at the paper, where substantial seniority among reporters and editors was said to be unusual and unappreciated. At the Salisbury paper, by contrast, longevity was encouraged by the editor and publishers, according to the editor, and several newsroom employees had worked five decades or more at the paper. Average length of employment of study participants in Rocky Mount was three years. The average of participants in Salisbury was 18.5 years.

Substantial difference in total newsroom staffing also was apparent. In Rocky Mount, newsroom staff totaled 23.²³ In Salisbury, staff totaled 30. Although the Rocky Mount paper employs the smaller newsroom staff, the town has the larger 1998 population — 60,243 versus Salisbury's comparable figure of 34,542.²⁴ Rocky Mount also has the higher estimated 1998 per-capita income — \$18,073 — versus Salisbury's comparable figure of \$15,735.²⁵ Both newspapers are the only daily mass-market publications in their respective towns.

Personal

Apparent differences between the two newspaper focus groups arose in response to questions about participants' interconnected professional and personal positions in their respective communities. In Rocky Mount, for example, the youngest focus-group participant expressed personal motivations — a primary interest in domestic stability in a year-old marriage and a secondary interest in athletics, namely, renewing earlier participation in track and field. In Salisbury, the youngest participant — although unmarried — became immersed in nonprofit service organizations immediately after arriving in town.

Rocky Mount focus-group participants unanimously expressed dissatisfaction with salaries, and all said they worked part-time jobs outside the newspaper to supplement newspaper income. None of the Salisbury participants expressed such concerns.

Similar variation in inner- and outer-directed behaviors and interests were reflected in other categories. In general, Rocky Mount focus-group participants expressed more inner-directed motives; Salisbury participants appeared to be more outwardly directed. That is, Salisbury participants more often tended to express themselves in terms of the concerns of the community, of others. Rocky Mount participants, on the other hand, more often expressed concerns in terms of themselves as individuals. The terms inner- and outer-directed are offered here as descriptive, not as reflective of the literature.

Professional

Familiarity with public journalism, as defined and debated in the literature, was not evident among focus-group participants. Most discussed it in traditional terms of serving the public, although in Salisbury Participant Three discussed public journalism in terms of being closer to readers' interests in a small town, whereas big-city newspapers lacked comparable connections that small-scale communities allowed.

A question about sources for news and feature stories indicated that Rocky Mount focus-group participants tended to look beyond the community for story ideas. Salisbury participants and the editor, on the other hand, indicated a strictly local focus for primary news sources.

Each newspaper's relationship to nearby big-city competitors indicated different perceptions between focus groups. In Rocky Mount, two focus-group participants indicated a willingness to compete with the Raleigh paper — which is headquartered an hour's drive away, although the Raleigh paper circulates in Rocky Mount — on the Raleigh paper's terms and turf. In Salisbury, the focus-group participants and the editor tended to view their paper as having a competitive advantage over the larger Charlotte paper by virtue of the Salisbury paper's command of its community.

Educational achievement differed little between the two focus groups. The average years of school among participants in Rocky Mount was 15.5 years. In Salisbury, the average among participants was 15.8.

However, as noted earlier, substantial variance was evident in the average number of years of professional experience as a

journalist among participants at each paper. Salisbury participants, who averaged 20.5 years of professional experience, had more than double the average professional experience of the Rocky Mount participants, with 9.5 years.

Salisbury participants also had substantially greater longevity of employment at their current newspapers. The average number of years worked at the Rocky Mount paper by participants was three years. Among Salisbury participants, the figure was 18.5.

Institutional

Staff morale appeared to be an issue in Rocky Mount, but not in Salisbury. Focus-group participants were pointedly critical of the Rocky Mount paper's commitment to its community, in terms of sponsorships of community events and the like. The editor in Rocky Mount, however, contradicted the focus-group participants' perceptions, suggesting another troublesome dimension of morale — interoffice communication between managers and employees. In Salisbury, focus-group complaints were limited to one participant's generally constructive suggestion that the newspaper's editorial positions should be stronger.

Some of the sharpest differences between focus groups arose in references to each paper's ownership and the owners' relationships to their respective communities. In Rocky Mount, focus-group participants perceived publishers as people who came and went through a revolving door, with widely varying commitments to community relationships but consistently parsimonious approach to expenses. In Salisbury, publishers were perceived as keepers of a constructive status quo that maintained a tradition of community service.

If actions can support focus-group participants' words, the locations of each newspaper's office may reinforce the discussions. In Salisbury, *The Post* occupies its own modern building on a busy block close to such downtown community institutions as the courthouse, the city hall and the public library. In Rocky Mount, the newspaper rents space in an office building across a river and three miles distant from the town center, where its former downtown office stands vacant. This observation does not arise from focus-group discussions, although it was discussed in the interview with the Rocky Mount editor, the last of this study's participants to be interviewed, because the researcher got lost in search of the newspaper's office. The difference in each newspaper's proximity to each downtown may suggest a measure of investment — institutional and financial — in each community.

Another measure of institutional connection to community

may be indicated by proximity of place of birth to place of employment. Presumably, the closer the proximity, the closer the community connection. The questionnaire filled out by participants asked place of birth. The distance between place of birth and place of employment — the town where the newspaper is published — was calculated using a North Carolina map and an Internet mapping service. An average distance was calculated for each paper. For Rocky Mount participants, the average distance was 172 miles. For Salisbury participants, the average distance was 121 miles.

Cultural

Staff diversity was one of two cultural elements of discussion in the focus groups. Both focus groups included one African-American reporter. Only in the Rocky Mount focus group was the subject of race discussed specifically. In one discussion thread, the subject arose in the context of the African-American reporter as representative of the local black community. In a second thread, the subject arose in terms of a white staff member who had alienated the black community. In the case of the former Salisbury reporter whose views on abortion and homosexuality divided the staff, participants' discussion of the former colleague was respectful.

The second cultural component of the focus groups concerned each newspaper's institutional relationship with the community, which in the Rocky Mount case is described in the preceding paragraph. In Salisbury, this dimension of diversity arose in the editor interview, in which the editor expressed worry that community diversity may not be adequately represented in the paper's news columns by a staff that is predominantly white and middle class.

The final cultural component of the paper, its reporters and their relationships to the community concerns participants' view of the nearby big city. Among Rocky Mount participants, the city of Raleigh was viewed as a source of cultural enrichment. In Salisbury, no similar view of nearby Charlotte was expressed.

Civic

Rocky Mount participants were more likely to report membership in civic groups, but the Salisbury participants reported a longer tradition of community involvement, both in terms of individual commitment and institutional commitment. Editors at each paper expressed similar unwritten policies on reporters' civic-group involvements, but the Salisbury editor couched the policy in more activist terms; the Rocky Mount editor couched the policy in neutral terms.

Further, Rocky Mount focus-group participants expressed critical remarks about the paper's wavering institutional involvement in community civic affairs, although their remarks in some cases were contradicted by their editor. Salisbury participants spoke appreciatively of the paper's sustained tradition of institutional civic involvement.

Salisbury participants also discussed difficulties that civic involvement had visited on them and their paper. But the editor concluded that civic involvement, both personally and institutionally on balance was best for all involved.

Salisbury's greater civic orientation is supported by content analysis of a constructed week of 1997 issues published by both newspapers, which showed that the Salisbury paper contained more than five times the civic-oriented content of the Rocky Mount paper.²⁶

Political

Political life, a key element of public journalism that involves deliberation of political issues, was not well supported at either paper. All participants said they were registered voters, but personal interest in local politics was expressed only weakly at both papers. Non-partisanship is an important element of professional norms of balance, fairness and objectivity. But the papers' institutional roles in support of political life in their respective communities received only modest expression of support. Participants at both papers explained a generally unaggressive approach to political issues by expressing a reluctance to offend political partisans.

In word as well as in deed, both papers indicated little willingness to change approaches to municipal election coverage which, in a content analysis of a constructed week of 1997 issues, found almost identical small amounts of political coverage — 110 paragraphs versus 111 paragraphs.²⁷ In Rocky Mount, campaign coverage was concentrated in one edition published two days before the election. In Salisbury, the coverage extended over four issues published in several weeks before the election.²⁸

Conclusion

The two newspapers selected for this study were chosen for their positions at opposite ends on a spectrum of editorial vigor, as measured by number of state-press-association awards given during the current decade. That led to this study's questions about editorial vigor as a reflection of a form of public journalism characterized by personal, professional and institutional closeness to a small town's civic and political spheres.

The study's first research question — Is editorial vigor an

indicator of predisposition to public journalism? — can be answered yes, with caveats. If predisposition to public journalism means a consistent and pervasive culture of civic engagement from top to bottom within a newspaper organization, then the Salisbury paper fits such criteria. The Rocky Mount newspaper would not fit.

However, the Rocky Mount paper, as represented by its editor, did express a greater interest in political engagement between the newspaper as an institution and the community it serves, with a goal of increasing political deliberation and participation. Those expressions are consistent with core ideals of public journalism. It should be noted, however, that the Rocky Mount editor's expressions had not been put into effect, nor had they been accepted as policies by his superiors. In Salisbury, one focus group participant expressed similar interest in a more vigorous institutional engagement in the community's political life, but that interest was not shared by the newspaper's editor nor was it manifest in the paper's approach to municipal-election coverage.

Research suggests that public journalism may be a more costly big-city alternative to a small-town variant exhibited by the Salisbury paper. The Salisbury variant would have to be called civic journalism, because of its emphasis on the community's civic life and de-emphasis of its political life. The Rocky Mount paper is as yet untested on the civic or the political aspects of its editor's expressed interest in public journalism concepts, including efforts to build social capital in the public arena of municipal election campaigns. It is worth noting that the Rocky Mount newspaper's posture may be an artifact of its previous ownership, the Thomson group, whose cost-cutting and profit-taking during the previous decade cut quality to the point of causing revenue losses, a development that set the company apart from other U.S. newspaper chains.

This study's second research question — Are reporters and editors at small newspapers practicing public journalism and espousing its values without labeling or thinking about it? — can be answered in the affirmative, again with caveats. With exceptions at each of the two papers under study here, most study participants appeared to be unaware of the concepts and practices of public journalism. They weren't thinking about public journalism. But at least in Salisbury, the paper, its owners and its staff without exception were concerned with maintaining the vigorous culture of civic and community improvement that they cited as their legacy of the paper's previous owners. This sentiment may have been best captured by the Salisbury editor, who said: "I'm a part of this community, and there are things that I want to see succeed, and

there are causes that I believe in.” “Detachment” and “disconnect” do not describe such professional sentiments. Further, the sentiment was manifested in content analysis that showed nearly six times the civic-oriented content in the Salisbury paper than in the Rocky Mount paper.²⁹

However, as noted above, the Rocky Mount editor did express greater interest in intensifying the paper’s involvement in public deliberation of local issues, although that interest had not yet been acted on. The Rocky Mount paper matched the Salisbury paper’s modest amount of coverage of local municipal elections.³⁰

The study’s final research question — Does newspaper and community size make a difference to public journalism? — can be answered in the affirmative, at least tentatively, in the views of participants in Salisbury. Reporters and the editor there viewed their paper’s comparatively small circulation and their town’s comparatively small size as competitive and professional advantages on which the state’s biggest newspaper in Charlotte could not capitalize. Participants in Rocky Mount apparently did not share that view.

Size does appear to make a difference to public journalism, although the variant in this study could more properly be labeled civic journalism, because of the evident de-emphasis of political life at both papers and, at least at the Salisbury paper, the greater emphasis on the civic component of community life.

This finding leads to a question for further research: Does a vigorous civic life substitute for political life? That is, does a newspaper’s engagement in civic life produce beneficial community effects that in other periods or circumstances that active engagement in political life might have produced? Study of community effects — creation of social capital — would be a profitable area for further research, not only involving the papers under study here, but also in comparison with larger papers, including those that practice public journalism in North Carolina.

Finally, this research appears to support a theory that organizational culture can predispose a newspaper to civic and political commitment — to public journalism — or it can inhibit such commitments through parsimony. ■

NOTES

1. Merritt, Davis Jr. (1998). *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough*. (2nd ugh, edition Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Merritt writes of an epiphany he experienced following the presidential election of 1988 that prompted his

rethinking of traditional journalism. Merritt wasn't the only newspaperman thinking those thoughts at about that time. In a seminal 1989 meeting of his editorial writers, James K. Batten, chief executive officer of Knight Ridder, one of the nation's largest newspaper chains, argued that a newspaper and its community are part of a single system in which neither can succeed without the other. The company has made public journalism its policy throughout its chain of newspapers. Proceedings of the 1989 meeting are available in a Knight Ridder report, "Newspapers, Community and Leadership: A Symposium on Editorial Pages," Key Biscayne, Fla., Nov. 12-14, 1989.

2. Hoyt, Mike (Sept./Oct. 1995). "Are You Now Or Will You Ever Be a Civic Journalist? As the Theory Moves Into Practice in More and More Newsrooms, the Debate Gets Sharper," *Columbia Journalism Review*, pp. 27-33. See also: Editorial (January-February 1995). "The Real Public Journalism," *American Journalism Review*, p. 25. See also: Rosen, Jay (January/February 1996). "On Being Civic-Minded," *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 5.
3. Weitzel, Peter (1998). "Does maintaining credibility have to mean disconnecting from community?" *American Society of Newspaper Editors*.

See also: Page, Benjamin I. (1996). *Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 88: "[T]he press was out of touch with ordinary Americans — É reporters no longer belonged to the working class but were success-oriented professionals, living in Georgetown and Chevy Chase, entertaining senators, playing golf and sending their children to private schools."

See also: Schudson, Michael (1998). *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: The Free Press, p. 196. Schudson writes that the idea of detached journalists took root early this century during the Progressive Era, when citizens were expected to be rational evaluators of fact instead of partisans of political rhetoric. Detached journalism fit the new citizenship paradigm.

4. Woo, William F. (Fall 1995). "Public Journalism and the Tradition of Detachment," *The Masthead*, pp. 15-20.
5. Fouhy, Edward M. (Spring 1996). "Civic Journalism: Rebuilding the Foundations of Democracy, Civic Partners. Washington, D.C.: Pew Partnership for Civic Change. (available online at http://www.journalism.wisc.edu/cpn/pew_partnership/civic_partners_journalism.html). Fouhy wrote: "Newspaper circulation is sliding at an alarming rate. Of the top 25 newspapers in the country, only one, The Boston Globe, did not drop a drop in circulation in the last reporting period."

See also: Morton, John (Spring 1996). "How Big Should Profits Be? Two Times the Fortune 500 Average?", *Nieman Reports*, pp. 9-10. Morton writes that daily newspapers have recorded double-digit declines in circulation and market penetration during the preceding two decades.

See also: Newspaper Association of America (1997). *Facts About Newspapers 1997*. Vienna, Va.: Newspaper Association of America. The volume reports that 78 percent of U.S. adults read a daily newspaper in 1970, 67 percent in 1980, 62 percent in 1990 and 59 percent

in 1996.

6. Meyer, Philip, "If It Works, How Will We Know," in Lambeth, Edmund B.; Meyer, Philip E. and Thorson, Esther (eds.) (1998). *Assessing Public Journalism*. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, p. 252.

Public journalism is the preferred term in this study, although synonymous terms are found in the literature. Meyer writes that other terms include civic journalism and citizen-based journalism. Such uses sometimes are determined by which organization publishes the research on the subject. The Knight Foundation, for example, prefers the term public journalism; the Pew Trusts prefer the term civic journalism, and the Poynter Institute prefers the term citizen-based journalism. Public journalism seems to be the term most often used in the journalism trade press and in mass-audience publications, such as newspapers.

7. The Meyer-Potter study was sponsored by the Poynter Institute and used the term citizen-based journalism. See: Philip Meyer and Deborah Potter, "Hidden Value: Polls and Public Journalism," in Paul Lavarakas and Michael Traugott, eds., "Election Polls, the News Media and Democracy." In press, Chatham House, 1999. A summary, "Making a Difference: Covering Campaign '96, a report on the Poynter Election Project," may be found at www.unc.edu/~pmeyer

8. Public journalism should not be confused with community journalism, although the two terms are related in concept and in practice. A key distinction appears to be detachment, and how far along a continuum from complete detachment to complete alignment with community goals a newspaper is willing to go. Community journalism seems more willing to move toward the complete-alignment side of the continuum than public journalism does. Size also seems to be a key factor, with community journalism more prevalent among the smallest newspapers, including weeklies. See: Lauterer, Jock (1995). *Community Journalism: The Personal Approach*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

9. Weitzel, op cit.

10. Merritt, Davis Jr. (1998). *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough*. (2nd edition). Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

See also: Weitzel, op cit.

See also: Page, op cit.

11. Bellah, Robert N.; Madsen, Richard, et al. (1996). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 177.

Bellah writes: "The associational life of the modern metropolis does not generate the kinds of ... social responsibility and practices of commitment to the public good that we saw in the associational life of the . . . township."

12. Editor & Publisher, (incomplete cite)

13. The North Carolina Press Association, in communication with the author.

14. The North Carolina Press Association listed both papers in this daily-circulation category during the 1990s, until 1998, when the Rocky Mount paper slipped below the 15,000 figure. This study therefore

limits its focus to the decade prior to that year. A total of 16 newspapers fell into this NCPA circulation category during the decade of the 1990s.

15. Demers, David Pearce (1996). *The Menace of the Corporate Newspaper: Fact or Fiction?* Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

Demers also uses the term editorial vigor, but his definition differs from the definition used in this study. Demers employs the term in his survey research on corporate newspapers and whether they are bad for journalism. According to Demers, two characteristics define editorial vigor: first, criticism of mainstream institutions and norms and, second, an organizational structure that permits members of the editorial-page staff to offer such criticism. Interestingly, Demers alludes to newspaper size and detachment in his discussion of vigor. First, Demers writes, corporate newspapers tend to be located in pluralistic communities with diverse opinions and ideas. Second, news workers tend to be immune to pressures from local institutions because news workers tend not to have grown up in the communities their newspapers serve, they tend to work at their newspapers for short periods of time, they tend to be more oriented toward the corporation than to the community for approval, and they are more likely to base their news judgments on professional norms rather than on local public opinion. Finally, Demers does not consider himself an apologist for the corporate form. He also has called for research into the pace of social change and whether it occurs with sufficient speed to keep democratic society strong.

16. The paper is owned by the Cox Newspapers Inc. group, which bought the paper from the Thomson Newspapers group. The Thomson group is the focus of a recent study that concluded the chain's cost-cutting and profit-taking during the previous decade cut quality to the point of causing lost revenues, a development that set the chain apart from other U.S. newspaper chains. See: Lacy, Stephen and Martin, Hugh J. (Summer 1998). "Profits Up, Circulation Down for Thomson Papers in the '80s," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 19:3, pp. 63-76.
17. Lengths of combined transcripts of reporters and editors were 43 single-spaced pages for the Salisbury Post and 46 pages for The Rocky Mount Telegram. Transcripts are in the possession of the author.
18. Krueger, Richard A. (1988). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage, pp. 60-61.
19. Morgan, David L. (1988). *Focus Groups As Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage, p. 56
20. *Ibid*, p. 95.
21. Reger, Rhonda K. et al. (July 1994). "Reframing the organization: why implementing total quality is easier said than done," *Academy of Management Review*, 19: 3, pp. 565-584.
22. Schudson, Michael (1998). *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: The Free Press, p. 12: "A 'public sphere,' as current academic discourse uses the term, refers both to the public forum independent of government and to private associations beyond the household where people come together to discuss public affairs." This study uses the term "civic" to describe Schudson's definition, to avoid ambiguity by use of the term "public," particularly in relationship to the political sphere.

23. The figure includes two new positions recently authorized but not yet filled at the time.
24. Editor & Publisher Market Guide (1998), p. II-299.
25. Editor & Publisher Market Guide (1990), pp. IV-79-81; Editor & Publisher Market Guide (1998), p. IV-77-73.
26. Loomis, David O. (Spring 1999). "Back to Mayberry: Searching for the Roots of Civic Journalism in Small North Carolina Towns," paper prepared for political science seminar conducted by Prof. Michael MacKuen, p. 14. See Appendix 3, p. 52.
27. See Appendix 3, p. 52.
28. See Appendix 3, p. 52.
29. Appendix 3, p. 52.
30. Appendix 3, p. 52.

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