A STUDY OF ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES AMONG NEWS PRODUCERS, NEWS DIRECTORS, FIELD REPORTERS AND THE VIEWING PUBLIC ON THE ETHICS OF ONE ASPECT OF ON-THE-SPOT TELEVISION NEWS GATHERING

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PREFACE

A questionnaire for measuring attitudes concerning the intervention of television news crew members in life-threatening story situations was developed. The survey was administered to television newsroom staff members. A comparison to a sample of the viewing public was included in the statistics. This study was designed to examine the ethical questions of responsibility that are a part of news gathering and reporting. These questions are highly debatable and increasingly difficult to answer with the expansion of technology and current events.

I wish to express my most sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. William Rugg, as well as the other committee members, Dr. Walter Ward and Dr. Michael Buckholz. Their invaluable guidance and help aided me in the completion of this work.

The assistance of the Tulsa and Oklahoma City television stations was also greatly appreciated.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the early stages of television, producers in this powerful medium have struggled with a full spectrum of responsibilities encountered daily.

These responsibilities range from programming and censorship decisions to dissemination of news and information. One of the most dramatic responsibilities faced by television producers concerns the medium's power to affect human life, not only in everyday routine, but in life or death situations.

A case in point is that of Cecil Andrews and WHMA-TV in Anniston, Alabama. On March 4, 1983, Ronald Simmons, a videographer, and Gary Harris, a sound technician at WHMA-TV were faced, unexpectedly, with the power to help prevent or precipitate a near death situation. Their choice of whether to be compassionate human beings or professional news gatherers, or both, is the basis of this study.

On the evening of March 4, 1983, WHMA-TV received four telephone calls from the same man. Each time, the voice said: "If you want to see somebody set himself on fire, be at the square in Jacksonville in ten minutes."[1] In the newsroom that night were an office worker, videographer

Ronald Simmons and sound technican Gary Harris. Phillip Cox, WHMA-TV news director, sent out his crew and notified Jacksonville police, who, in turn, called the fire department for back-up assistance.[2]

The caller, Cecil Andrews, an unemployed roofer, waited nearly an hour after his initial phone call. He was drunk. Simmons and Harris arrived at Andrew's location and set up their lights and camera. There was no sign of the police or fire department. After trying to stall Andrews for a while, they turned on the lights and began to record. Andrews had doused himself in lighter fluid and had tried several times to strike a match. Finally he succeeded and burst into flames for the rolling video tape. Later, Simmons and Harris admitted that they waited 37 seconds before either of them attempted to extinguish the flames . . . .[3]

This episode was followed by a flurry of inquiries about the ethics of Harris' and Simmons' actions that night. They became celebrities for a period of time because some authorities thought that the two-man crew did not act with enough immediacy on the threat that Andrews posed on his own life. This was viewed as a costly judgment error. Many broadcast journalists questioned what Harris and Simmons did because of the ethical responsibilities considered a part of news gathering that were not upheld.

The ethical question about this event and others like it have been debated for quite some time, especially in the field of photojournalism. These questions, concerning the

influence of the media and its responsibilitiy at the news scene, as yet, are still unresolved. Regarding ethical concerns in photo-journalism, Harold Evans, editor of the London Sunday Times wrote: "There are four areas of sensitivity: violence; intrusions into privacy; sex and public decency; and faking."[4] If the "areas of sensitivity" are of legitimate concern, and it would be generally agreed that Cecil Andrews' act was one of violence, then one must determine where one's responsibilities lie.

Gerald Gross, author of Responsibility of the Press, adds, in more specific terms: "Social responsiblity theory puts strong faith in the conscience of every newsman. It expects him, in following it, to do duty not only to himself but to society as well."[5] If this is true also, can one then repeatedly evaluate by some means the performance of Harris and Simmons by the terms Gross has set?

Statement of the Problem

Should news reporters become involved in life-threatening situations they are covering for the news? After March 4, 1983, it was as though newsmen and directors suddenly realized that at anytime during their daily news gathering process, something, or anything, could go seriously wrong and they would not, or could not, have adequate control of the situation and its consequences.

The presence of news video cameras at significant news happenings has been an issue of concern for quite some time.

In the summer of 1960, Buford Ellington, then governor of Tennessee, claimed that CBS staged a sit-in for the documentary, "Anatomy of a Demonstration." Though CBS denies the charge, some say it still "cannot escape responsibility" as a factor.[6]

It has been a necessary part of this research to evaluate some recent news events, just as these examples suggest. Through the guarantees of the First Amendment[7], theories such as the "Social Responsibility Theory"[8], and the broadcast codes have provided some criteria, it is clear that, when faced with an ethical decision, news people generally have failed to act responsibly and do what was "right."

The problem, as this writer approaches it, is that news directors and producers have not clearly analyzed their position in serious ethical decisions that must, from time to time, be made. While these decisions usually cannot be predetermined until actually faced, one should have some general idea or thought on certain areas. Often when a situation arises, news directors and their staffs do not allow the required amount of time to make a responsible and fair decision for all concerned.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore one aspect of the "ethics" question related to on-the-spot news gathering

by using the Cecil Andrews case as an example and as a point of embarkation.

An attitudinal survey, designed by this writer, was administered for this study to determine the opinion held by news producers, directors, and reporters of Tulsa and Oklahoma City of three incidents of recent years involving this question of ethics and responsibilities. The survey should also provoke some thought and interest toward the importance of a newsperson's responsibilities assumed at a prime level of news production.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is the provision of new information and analysis on the precarious question of ethics that has long been debated but never resolved.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to only one portion of the issue of the ethics and responsibilities of television news gathering production staff members: should they intervene in the news events they are covering when these situations become life threatening?

This study is also limited to a survey of 30 news directors, producers, and reporters at four network television stations in Tulsa and Oklahoma City and a convenience sample of 30 subjects from the Stillwater, Oklahoma, general public.[9]

Finally, the survey instrument was administered only to the remote news gathering production staff and news producers and directors in Oklahoma, as well as the sample of the Stillwater public.

Research Design

An attitudinal survey was administered to a specified sample to assess the range and differences between the attitudes of the television viewing audience and the attitudes of newsroom producers, directors, and field reporters of four major commercial television stations in Oklahoma. Each newsroom staff member viewed a film clip from the 1969 motion picture Medium Cool[10], had information read to them about Cecil Andrews and his exhibition, and then saw one final news clip of a news team who participated in the rescue of two possible drowning victims. Finally, they were asked to complete a questionnaire to evaluate their opinion of these situations to comprise the opinions on which a comparison between all groups will be based. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

ENDNOTES

[1]William A. Henry, "When News Is Almost A Crime," Time, 21 March, 1983, p. 84.

[2]Charles Kaiser, "The Camera's Cold Eye," Newsweek, 21 March, 1983, p. 53.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Harold Evans, Picture On A Page (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1978), p. 285.

[5]Gerald Gross, Responsibility of the Press (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 48.

[6]Transcript from Public Television Publications. "Inside Story: Photo Opportunity," April 28, 1983, pp. 1-10.

[7]Don R. Pember, Mass Media Law (Dubuque, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1977), p. 42.

[8]Gross, p. 29.

[9]Definition and method of sample selection can be found in Chapter III on page 22.

[10]Medium Cool is a film produced in 1969 by Paramount Pictures which addresses the issue of the media's responsibilities when covering the events that may threaten a life.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The search for literature took three basically different avenues: 1) theoretical background; 2) previous studies, theses or dissertations; and 3) recent events in the media and the regulation or criticism thereof.

First, it seemed necessary to review the source of all Federal law and legal rights of the media in the United States as outlined in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.[1] It reads:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.[2]

Under the First Amendment, one can get only a very general idea of the regulations imposed on the media; simply that it is free. It would appear that the media has legal restrictions to abide by, such as invasion of privacy and libel laws (Roscoe-Pound, Harrison, Tookey, et al.),[3] but the legal obligation of members of the media to involve themselves in life-threatening situations seems to be no greater than the public's legal obligation under the same circumstances (i.e., the public has no legal obligation to become involved in such situations). This researcher has found no

evidence to the contrary, therefore, any obligation must be a social and moral one.

The Social Responsibility Theory offers some guidelines for the media if it chooses to accept them. The Commission on Freedom of the Press chaired by Robert Hutchins is primarily responsible for articulating the elements of this theory. The Commission found that the Social Responsibility Theory is "rightly viewed as an effort to recover a moral base for freedom of speech."[4] Theodore Peterson writes in Gerald Gross's book, The Responsibility of the Press:

> [The reporter] has the duty to study the facts . . . weigh ideas which do not necessarily match his own . . . and put his basic assumptions up for challenge . . . . The press is accepting only half of its responsibility if it does not help him [realize] that he must . . . .[5]

Yes, indeed, he must. Then, how is a decision made that can be called, after all is said and done, ethical? Needless to say, it could not be an easy task when facing a situation where a life and/or a story is at stake. Even the Social Responsibility Theory offers little advice except to rely on the conscience of reporters. This theory has one major premise:

> Freedom carries concomittant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions or mass communication in contemporary society."[6]

The Social Responsibility Theory also expounds liberally on the media in terms of its business aspects, but Joseph Pulitzer wrote in 1904, just as this theory was

emerging:

> Nothing less than the highest ideals, the most scrupulous anxiety to do right, the most accurate knowledge of the problems it has to meet, and a sincere sense of moral responsiblity will save (the media) from a subservience to business interests, seeking selfish ends, antagonistic to public welfare.[7]

Though this issue has most recently been debated after the WHMA-TV/Cecil Andrews controversy, there were no previous studies found in the Journalism Abstracts 1964-1981 or in the Oklahoma State University library thesis file that had any bearing on this study. Some theses and dissertations that were found included the following indirectly related research issues and results.

Robert Cockrum finds in his research at Texas Tech that the history of the right to privacy shows its development from English common law. His study attempts to establish guidelines for the reporter-editor based on decisions rendered by courts at various state and federal levels.[8] Cockrum's study, however, makes little comment towards this study except for that point of law.

Philip Cogan of the University of Washington wrote a study of libel law's impact on daily newspapers and commercial television stations. He finds that while the First Amendment prohibits the Congress from abridging freedom of the press, "the press themselves are responsible for restructuring the same right."[9]

Further, privacy laws also provide some regulations for the media as John Harrison of the University of Oregon found

through research in 1978. He states that "the tort of intrusion is a branch of privacy to protect some non-private as well as private interests."[10] The purpose of this study was to demonstrate that this common interest privilege developed in defamation law should be available in cases of media intrusion.

Some interesting studies were found concerning the Social Responsibility Theory and the media, such as Don Maple's study, which reports on research on the attitudes of state legislators from Texas, Illinois and Massachusetts toward the tenets of the press. Three groups (newsmen, a segment of the government, and the public) were proposed to interact to produce the press-society relationship described by the Social Responsibility Theory.[11]

A study done at Oklahoma State University by David Cramer sought to determine what a sample of a selected public's attitude was toward media rights. No relationship was found between attitudes toward press freedom and education, age, income or combinations thereof. Statistically significant, but weak differences were found in the respondents' attitudes toward each level of freedom. Overall respondents appeared to hold no intense attitudes toward freedom of the press/media.[12]

Dorothy Bowles of the University of Wisconsin conducted research involving a systematic study of newspaper editorial treatment of the freedom of speech and press clauses of the First Amendment. Evidence presented in this study shows

that when newspapers took an editorial stand on claims to First Amendment protection, they were overwhelmingly supportive of the claim.[13]

A considerable amount of studies were found concerning ethics in the media. Harvey Chabot's study examined the photographer's ethics as judged by three types of Florida daily newspaper news managers. All three types of news manager respondents were expected to make similar ethical evaluations concerning the photographer's actions. The results show that the ethics of the photographer's actions are not only viewed in terms of his actions in the field but are also contingent upon whether the photographer tells the desk how he handled the given photo assignment.[14]

John Breslin researched a sharp increase of terrorism that swept the world in the 1970s. Terrorism posed a serious problem for the media: terrorism is newsworthy, but the media must cover it without being used for propaganda. Possible implications of irresponsible media coverage were discussed from the perspectives of criminal-tort liability, police-media relations and First Amendment rights. Study of the problem of irresponsible media coverage revealed no single solution.[15]

Margaret Regus conducted a study of two recent decisions to deny the Pulitzer Prize to newspapers because deception was used in the news gathering process. This has sparked much debate among professional journalists. Interviews were conducted with eleven veteran investigative

reporters across the nation who were assigned to one of three categories based on their attitudes towards deception: purist, situationalist, and pragmatist. The reporters agreed that deception should not be used routinely.[16]

Finally, a study by Ellen Henderson examines perceptions of newsroom staff and management as to staff's input into decisions that directly affect staff members' jobs in the newsroom. The study concludes that employees (in this case, management) who feel they have the most input into decision-making are happier in their jobs.[17]

A number of articles in professional journals, magazines, and books were helpful in addressing some of the immediate concerns of the ethics of the question of involvement. Like other professions, journalism is greatly influenced by ethical standards. Unlike other professions, however, journalism has avoided codefying its ethics into clear and usable rules. Peter Sandman and his colleagues find that:

> The various professional codes of the mass media tend to concentrate on truisms and trivia, ignoring the real ethical problems faced by working journalists. There are no sure answers to these problems. But the media establishment has been inordinatley slow to formulate even tentative answers.[18]

Gabe Pressman, a newsman for WNBC in New York, once said that:

> As a group, reporters have really never formalized their ethics. Yet I think that the best of them have always followed the strictest code of ethics, a code that would compare well with what the medical and legal professions have established. It's a dedication to uncovering the truth, to

> communicating the information to people . . . to reporting the news without prejudice.[19]

Jim Lehrer, a Washington anchorman, also feels that broadcast journalists should "clean up our own ethics . . . . We've got to eliminate every smell of double standard."[20] "Mass communication should be responsible for producing 'the highest quality product it can,' . . . [it] still needs an ethic from which principles can be drawn to be applied to most every situation that journalists encounter."[21]

The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, adopted a code of ethics at their 1973 annual convention. The code carries a general statement regarding their "responsibilities (which) carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness."[22] It continues on to define responsibility, freedom of the press, ethics, accuracy and objectivity, and fair play. The code does not make a comment specifically concerning the question of personal involvement of the journalist in news stories.

Chesterfield Smith, former president of the American Bar Association, suggested that there should be some national code of ethics to which all journalists should be expected to subscribe. He states: "There's no responsible person that doesn't recognize that the best of the media have the highest standards and principles."[23]

Others like Anthony Smith of the The Quill feel that "journalism has always had a shifting set of ethical

principles complicated by prevailing catchwords [such as] 'objectivity' that have widely different meanings at different times and places."[24]

> The responsiblity [of ethical reporting] rests with the reporter, who must evaluate the significance of the event he is covering, the intent of the participants, their constituency, the effect of his own presence and actions on the scene, and the public's need for information about the event. The television journalist has not only the responsibility to his fellow man, he has uniquely the opportunity to carry out that responsiblity. The newsman's responsiblity is to speak to man with care and concern for his future. He needs no other code of ethics. Let him read the codes, if he wishes. They are in all the books, and they are all useful, and they are all inadequate. Not one of them mentions love.[25]

Gene Goodwin of The Quill seemed to narrow the issue down to four words: "The Ethics of Compassion." This article by Goodwin analyzes many of the recent events that illustrated that phrase, including the Cecil Andrews case used in this study. Goodwin states that "compassion" is a word that makes a lot of journalists squirm. It describes a condition that runs counter to the strong tradition and notion that a journalist must be a neutral observer rather than a participant in life or history.[26] While Goodwin cited many cases to support that opinion he did find one to the contrary.

A reporter for the Brandenton (Florida) Herald, Christine Wolff, helped stop a would-be suicide victim from jumping off a bridge near Tampa that had been the location of numerous previous attempts. She held onto the man's arm as he straddled the railing of the bridge until a state

trooper arrived. Later, Wolff recalls that she clutched her reporter's notebook and pen in her other hand.[27] Wolff still wrote a story; she even got a bonus for her efforts. Wolff had not lost her compassion but she did not forget her responsibility as a reporter, either.

Goodwin, however, does not find as much favor with the Andrews case. He reasons that some of the dispassionate attitude displayed in the sixties through the war is left over in the journalists of today.

Donald Zachary, author of the article "When Is A Thing Newsworthy?" asks, "Where do we want the line drawn between the press' rights and individual rights . . . and what may we in the media do by way of gathering (the news) . . .?"[28] This question that Zachary poses regarding newsworthiness is considered to be at least a factor in a newsperson's decision-making while covering a story. Yet other articles approached this ethical or moral issue from another direction. Photojournalists battle the suitability question in the print world every time the fashions change. The "areas of sensitivity" they must face are somewhat the same for television. Harold Evans lists them as violence, intrusions into privacy, sex and public decency, and faking.[29]

At many different times, there have been legal and moral codes of ethics to which journalists may subscribe. The Television Code speaks to the "Treatment of News and Public Events" in its fifth section but says very little

about actual news-gathering procedures. It mentions that "good taste should prevail in the selection and handling of news" and that "news reporting should be factual, fair and without bias."[30] It rules that other areas of news and public events "should be governed by accepted standards of ethical journalism."[31]

The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) has printed a book called CBS News Standards to which WCBS and its affiliates are expected to adhere. It states under "Personal Involvement in Story That is Being Covered:"

> . . . [reporters] who are covering a news event must not participate in that event in any way or for whatever reason. Our responsibility is to report and record news event . . . .[32]

A former CBS employee who is now news director at ABC affiliate KTUL in Tulsa, Tom Doerr, feels that this standard has been openly violated by CBS personnel.

J.C. Merrill, author of "The Press, the Government, and the Ethics Vacuum," suggests that:

> . . . in the press and in government there is an ethics vacuum. The press is confused about ethics because it is confused about its freedom. It sees its freedom as endangered if it puts too much emphasis on its 'responsibility.' Talk of responsibility leads to obligations and duties and these tend to restrict press freedom. Both press and government look at ethics from a vested interest and relativistic perspective, shying away from any absolutes and relegating ethics to particular times circumstances and problems.[33]

Though network news standards and guidelines set by the Television Code should provide some light for these tenuous situations, they appear to be too general and leave too much

room for judgment by individual stations when most of them have no written standards for their news department.

Summary of the Review of Literature

During the review of literature, this researcher explored several different aspects of the news media. This research indicated that the American public has enjoyed several levels of First Amendment protection. However, the literature poses several questions about the protection of the news media for itself and by the federal government.

While this information forms a strong background of knowledge and supports many elements that are distinctly related to ethics, attitudes and legislation in terms of the protection of reporters, news directors and producers, it does not create a solid foundation for the ethics of newsgathering in life-threatening situations. Hence, the literature suggests that there has been no previous study specifically regarding this issue.

Therefore, this study is proposed to determine the opinion held by news producers, directors, and reporters in Tulsa and Oklahoma City about three recent incidents involving this question of ethics and responsibilities. Since the literature shows a collaboration on attitudes in many situations and types of people in relation to news reporting, it is logical to submit the hyptheses that:

1. The general public responses will show the most altruistic attitudes (i.e., helping to save the

life in danger is more important than getting the story), and the reporters will show less altruism than the public but more than news directors. Producers will be the least altruistic;

2. There will be a significant difference between the general public's and television station employees' responses;
3. There will be a highly significant difference between news producers/directors and news reporters; and
4. Also, it is predicted that the viewing public responses to the survey will be more significantly different from the news producers and directors than from news reporters.

ENDNOTES

[1]Frank J. Kahn, ed., Documents of American Broadcasting, Second Edition, (New York, 1973), p. 3.

[2]United States Constitution; Amendment I.

[3]Please see Bibliography for the references listed.

[4]Paul Fackler, "The Hutchins Commission and the Democratic Theory, 1930-47" (Unpub. PhD dissertaion, Univeristy of Illinois-Urbana, 1982).

[5]Theodore Peterson, "Social Responsibility--Theory and Practice," The Responsibility of the Press, ed. Gerald Gross (New York, 1966), p. 49.

[6]Peterson, p. 74.

[7]Peterson, p. 83.

[8]Robert Cockrum, "The Mass Media and the Right to Privacy" (Unpub. thesis, Texas Tech University, 1977).

[9]Philip Cogan, "The Invisible Censor: A Study of Libel Law's Impact on Daily Newspapers and Commercial Televison Stations in a Western State" (Unpub. thesis, Univ. of Washington,

[10]John Harrison, "Privacy, Newsworthiness and Constitutional Balancing: In Defense of Media Intrusion" (Unpub. thesis, University of Oregon).

[11]Donald Maple, "State Legislators, Attitudes on the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press" (Unpub. thesis, University of Texas, 1977).

[12]David Cramer, "A Study of Attitudes Toward Freedom of the Press/Media" (Unpub. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1982).

[13]Dorothy Bowles, "Newspaper Editorial Support for Freedom of Speech and Press, 1919-1969" (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconcin, 1978).

[14]Harvey Chabot, "Photographer's Ethics in Ten Photojournalism Situations as Judged by Three Types of Florida Daily Newspaper News Managers" Unpub. thesis, University of Florida, 1974).

[15]John Breslin, "Terrorism and the Media: A Delicate Balance Between the Right to News and the Right to Life" (Unpub. thesis, University of Georgia, 1979).

[16]Margaret Regus, "Deception in News Gathering by Investigative Reporters" (Unpub. thesis, California State University, 1982).

[17]Ellen Henderson, "A Study of Staff Participation in Newsroom Decision-Making" (Unpub. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1978).

[18]Peter Sandman, David Rubin, and David Sachsman, Media: An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communication. (New Jersey, 1972) p. 82.

[19]Sandman, et al., p. 70.

[20]"Above All Laws and Rules," USA Today (April 1982), p. 12.

[21]John Ferre, "Contemporary Approaches to Journalistic Ethics," Communication Quarterly (Spring 1980), p. 44.

[22]William Rivers and Wibur Schramm. Responsibility in Mass Communication (New York, 1969) p. 291.

[23]"Who's Got the Ethics?," The Quill (September 1982), p. 7

[24]Anthony Smith, "Is Objectivity Obsolete?" Columbia Journalism Review (May/June 1980), p. 51.

[25]Maury Green, Television News: Anatomy and Process (Belmont, Calif., 1969), p. 27.

[26]Gene Goodwin, "The Ethics of Compassion," The Quill (Nov. 1983), p. 38.

[27]Goodwin, p. 39.

[28]Donald Zachary, "When Is A Thing Newsworthy?" Center Magazine (Dec. 1982), p. 43.

[29]Harold Evans, Pictures on A Page, (Belmont, Calif., 1978), p. 285.

[30]Rivers, et al., p. 260.

[31]Ibid.

[32]CBS News Standards, revised, April 14, 1976, p. 48.

[33]J.C. Merrill, "The Press, the Government, and the Ethics Vacuum," Communication, 6(2), 1981, p. 179.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter is intended to explain the experimental portion of this thesis. This chapter will be in four segments: 1) population; 2) the experiment's components; 3) the procedure; and 4) the statistical analysis tool.

Population

There are six network affiliate television stations in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, combined, three in each city. For this study, each of the stations were contacted by telephone through the news director to ask their cooperation with this study. They were asked to provide this writer with at least two people in each of three positions: a news producer, a news director, and a news reporter. All three stations in Tulsa agreed to participate in the study. One station in Oklahoma City agreed. A follow-up notice was sent to each news director to inform him of the time, date, and the facilities required. From the four stations that agreed to participate, 10 producers, eight directors, and 12 reporters participated.

A selected sample from Stillwater, Oklahoma's, general city and university population was selected with the help of

city manager, the Chamber of Commerce, and Oklahoma State University Professor Fred Kolch.* The selection process was constructed with the help of referrals from the Stillwater city manager and the Chamber of Commerce. Officials of the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce supplied a comprehensive list of all clubs and organizations in the Stillwater area. Upon receiving this list, each group was assigned a number from one to 40. Fifteen numbers were chosen from a random numbers chart. The clubs that were assigned the numbers chosen from the chart were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study.

Students from a radio announcing class at Oklahoma State University also participated in this study to constitute a convenience sampling of the student population within Stillwater's general public.

Experiment Components

The study itself consisted of two video segments, a written description of an incident (not available on tape) and the questionnaire. The first video segment was a two-minute film clip from the motion picture Medium Cool. Other than the fact that this portion of the film was shown without the remaining 107 minutes, the clip was intact. The clip was taken from the opening minutes of the film but

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*Stillwater, Oklahoma, is a city situated equi-distant between Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Stillwater is largely comprised of students and faculty members because Oklahoma State University is located there.

without the introductory credits. This portion of the film showed two men, a videographer and sound technician, walking toward the scene of a car accident. As the camera approaches, one can see that there are still people in or partially out of the car involved in the wreck. The two-man news crew silently goes about the business of getting shots from different angles and sound levels from the moaning victim. When they have gotten everything they need, they walk back to the station's car to pack away the equipment in the trunk. Finally, the videographer says, "You better call an ambulance." This segment goes to black as the sound technician walks towards the front of the car. This film was loaned for the purpose of this study by Paramount Pictures - Films, Incorporated. Medium Cool was produced in 1969 by Tully Friedman and directed and written by Haskell Wexler. This film was chosen for use in this study because of the statement it makes about the responsibilities to public that the media should recognize.

The second video segment was from WGN-TV in Chicago, Illinois. Jim Disch, news director at WGN, gave permission for this segment to be used in this study. It was the video taped segment of a newscast in which the lead story was about how part of their news crew helped save a man from drowning in Lake Michigan. This segment shows one man of the three-man television crew trying to inch an extension cable to the stranded man in the water. There were already two men holding on to the stranded man and keeping him above

the water. In a few minutes the fire department arrives and retrieves the stranded man from the water as well as his son who had been under water during this time. This clip also shows the ambulance loading the victims and driving away. At the end, there is an interview with the videographer (who had been taping the event) and the crew member who went for the cable. Each said, in essence, that the story was secondary as long as they were doing what they could to help in the rescue.

The written description was read to the subjects by this writer. It described the Cecil Andrews encounter with WHMA-TV on March 4, 1983. The information was assembled from several magazine articles (see Appendix B). Most of this information about Cecil Andrews was received from Public Television Publications Service of Kent, Ohio. A transcript of the April 28, 1983, edition of Inside Story, a PBS weekly program hosted by Hodding Carter titled "Photo Opportunity," discussed the issue of a reporter's involvement in life-threatening events such as the Andrews incident.

The questionnaire given to newsroom staff members asked them to designate their position and rate their level of agreement to each statement. Approximately four statements referred to each of the three events they had seen or heard about. The questions were arranged in the order that the events were presented. The last six questions were designed to rate opinions about values and the specific occupational

ethics involved. For every statement, each dash along the agreement continuum was a value from one to five. Each time the attitude of the statement was reversed, the number values were reversed, also (Appendix A). A value of five indicates that the subject is more likely to help a victim than continue to cover the story of the victim's situation if his life is in danger.

Procedures

The procedures varied from station to station in only one respect: some stations participated in groups of two to five and in other stations the employees were done singly. This is not a factor, however, in the outcome of the experiment. The subjects were told only what to expect (i.e. - they would see two video segments and hear a description of a third). Then, they would rate their opinion of what they saw and heard. The general public participants were treated in the same manner with one exception--members of the general public group were all addressed in the same one session. The Medium Cool film clip was shown, the Andrews case read, and then the second video segment was played. Finally, the respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire and the experiment was over.

Statistical Analysis

A Type I analysis of variance test was used to

differentiate and compare each group of variables. The independent variables were the two groups of subjects tested (the newsroom staff employees and the general public group). The dependent variables were the attitudinal statements (i.e., groups of statements) on the questionnaire. ETA and gap tests were also run to allow for error. The Type I design is used frequently in this kind of research in which different classes of people are asked to respond to or rate different aspects of a mass media unit. The analysis of variance test for a statistical difference between two or more groups was used.[1] The ETA and Gap tests determine the strengths of the significant differences.

ENDNOTE

[1]Fred Kerlinger, Foundation of Behavioral Research (New York, 1973), p. 242.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey indicated that the respondents, in general, felt that news crews should aid the victims of the story they are reporting, when possible. Some of the respondents commented (after the questionnaire had been completed) that in most circumstances the reporter at the scene should do what he can to help people in distress before actually gathering the news. Usually some radio dispatch service is available to reporters by which they can summon an ambulance and/or other authorities to the scene. This is generally done upon arriving at the scene, only after which a reporter will begin to gather news information.

The newsroom personnel who participated in the study thought the film clip from Medium Cool was completely unrealistic and did not depict an actual situation. Most producers and news directors felt that the Andrews story was one that they would not send reporters to cover. Most of the newsroom personnel regarded the WGN lake rescue story as a well-done report, and felt that their actions at the scene were very appropriate to the circumstances.

In all cases, those who expressed an opinion said there are factors which determine the amount and type of assistance given to distressed individuals, but in no case should a reporter continue to gather news information if it meant neglecting a victim in need of help.

The analysis calculated the attitudes of each newsroom staff groups (i.e., producers, directors, reporters) and then added the public sample group. The first analysis is the news staff groups (producers, news directors, and reporters) response to the five sets of question items or components of inquiry (questions 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-18). Each component of inquiry was designed to analyze a specific information segment as it was presented to the subjects during the study.

The first component of inquiry (#1-4) was designed to rate the opinions about the Medium Cool film clip shown in the first segment of the experiment. The second inquiry (#5-8) rated the opinions about the incident with WHMA-TV and the news crew sent to cover the Cecil Andrews story. The third inquiry (#9-11) rated opinions regarding the WGN-TV lake rescue story. The fourth inquiry (#12-14) was designed to evaluate the opinions about the relative value or worth of the Andrews story and the rescue story. The last component of inquiry (#15-18) was designed to determine the overall opinion or feeling about the involvement of news personnel in life-threatening situations covered as stories for a news broadcast.

A mean attitude was computed for each group of questions for every respondent, as well as for all respondents. These mean attitudes served as the bases for variance analyses. While the attitudes for members of the news staffs were employed for both tables, the scores from the general public sample were added to the second table (as the second group) for comparison in the analysis of variance.

TABLE I

MEAN TOTAL: NEWSROOM STAFF POSITIONS
BY COMPONENTS OF INQUIRY

	Car Accident (#1-4)	Man on Fire (#5-8)	Lake Rescue (#9-11)	Story Value (#12-14	Overall Story vs. vs. Life (#15-18)	
Producer	4.39	3.75	3.35	3.27	2.75	3.5
Director	3.86	3.86	3.51	4.43	3.07	3.75
Reporter	4.33	4.44	2.6	4.54	2.73	3.73
	4.19	4.02	3.15	4.08	2.85	3.63

Table I shows the relationship of the overall mean attitude for staff position and component of inquiry. In this table, a mean attitudinal score of .40 or greater is

significant as determined by post-hoc t-tests between the means (see Appendix C).

TABLE II

MEAN SCORES INTERACTION: NEWSROOM STAFF POSITION, AND AUDIENCE BY COMPONENTS OF INQUIRY

	Car Accident (#1-4)	Man on Fire (#5-8)	Lake Rescue (#9-11)	Story Value (#12-14)	Overall Story vs. vs. Life (#15-18)	
Producer	4.39	3.75	3.35	3.27	2.75	3.5
Director	3.86	3.86	3.51	4.43	3.07	3.75
Reporter	4.33	4.44	2.6	4.54	2.73	3.73
Audience	4.22	4.05	3.09	4.05	2.82	3.65
	4.205	4.025	3.14	4.07	2.84	3.64

The interaction in Table II shows that, overall, the immediate danger of a man's life by fire or car crash and the news value of getting that story would be more important than helping in a lake rescue. However, the general feeling of the newsroom staff members, as indicated by the last component of inquiry (#15-18), about getting the story is

almost equal to (or slightly more important) than helping to save a threatened life.

Specifically among each staff group, producers viewed saving the life most important in the automobile wreck, followed by the fire situation and then the drowning. Still, news producers, in general, felt that the news value of the situation was more important than helping to save a life.

News directors viewed most of the situations at the same level of importance. However, the news value of any of the stories was not as important as helping to save a life, to the news directors. Overall, actually getting the story was seen by news directors as almost equal to saving the life as indicated by attitude mean scores (see Table II).

Reporters attitudes showed that helping to save the life was the most important except in the lake rescue situations, even though getting the story was more important than the news value of any story.

Table II shows the same overall mean attitudes with the addition of the public audiences mean attitudes for each component of inquiry. In this table, a mean attitudinal of .45 or greater is significant as determined by the post-hoc t-tests (see Appendix C).

Table II indicates that the attitudes of the public audience vary in the same way as the reporters' attitudes. The addition of the audience group made no difference to the overall variation in mean totals. That is, the situation in

which a man is on fire would be one when all respondents, overall, would save the life before getting the story. This situation and the car accident were viewed equally as more important than the lake rescue in terms of helping to save the life. However, the news value of the stories was shown to be important, but the general feeling toward getting the story was always seen as more important than saving the life or the possible news value of that story.

The results of this study clearly do not support the hypotheses as stated in Chapter II. One of the most important findings was that the relationships that were predicted were found to be not statistically significant. The statistics show that there is no significant difference among the opinions of producers, directors, reporters, or the viewing audience. However, the individual overall mean attitudes range from 3.5 to 3.75, and these scores can be interpreted as leaning toward accepting more ethical responsibility (4.0) or just in the mid-range where opinions are, at best, neutral.

There is a difference, then, in the way the subjects felt about each of the news situations and/or stories; however, no hypotheses were made regarding this. In Table I, there is also some interaction between the type of position of the person and the attitude that the mean of the respondent groups indicated. Yet that interaction is not shown to be significant in the overall mean scores (far right column of Table II). Inside Table II one can see that

most of the significant differences in scores between groups of people occur primarily between producers and reporters, and reporters and directors. Interpreted loosely, this could show that both directors and producers are more concerned about "getting the story" than are reporters when human life is at stake. However, directors tend to regard those circumstances more like reporters than producers. Again, that interpretation must be considered liberal because the actual statistics show there is no real significant difference between any of the subject groups (see Appendix C), and by the comments expressed after the study, all of the newsroom staff feel generally the same. The public's mean attitudes in each component of inquiry were not higher than any of the newsroom staff attitudes in any question group, which would imply that the audience regards the news crew's responsibility to human life in the same way the news crew does.

Further, the component of inquiry that elicited the most ethical attitude responses (4.205) was for the component that seemed the most wrong or unethical. This was a result of that segment demonstrating the most "clear-cut" situation; the mistakes made by the crew members depicted in the film clip from Medium Cool (car accident) were highly recognizable. One news director called them "blatant." But when asked in the last four questions about situations in general, this component of inquiry (the overall theme being different degrees of "story-getting" situations when danger

to a life was of concern) received a mean score of less than 3.0. This probably indicates that the situations described in these four questions (15-19) were different enough to cloud the true attitude and resulted in a neutral mean score.

The questions (#9-11) about WGN's assistance in the rescue operation received an almost perfectly neutral score. However, this may primarily be due to two of the questions in this group. Questions #10 and #11 inquired about the value of the WGN news story and may have been considered leading questions toward the next section, and therefore, the answers to questions #10 and #11 may not stand on the question but as a kind of comparison to the following questions. It may be due, also, to the amount of assistance already available at the rescue scene. Respondents viewing this segment may feel that enough help had been provided.

Finally, one last point of consideration is the grouping and wording of the questions used in the questionnaire. Some questions were not to the advantage of a valid mean attitudes and should have been thrown out, re-grouped or re-worded before the official study was conducted. The third and fourth question groups seemed to have the most problem with this as questions #10, #11, and #13 could have been removed without detriment to the validity of the overall or group means.

The last component of inquiry appeared to be particularly misunderstood due to the complex and lengthy wording

of each question; this misunderstanding was reflected in the low attitudes of this component which were inconsistent with the other components and verbal comments. In retrospect, this particular component of inquiry could have easily sufficed with one or two questions considering the specificity of the issue questioned.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study, unknowingly, attempted a very great task. The problem, as stated in Chapter I, was whether television news crew members would become involved in life-threatening stories to help save or stabilize that life.

On the basis of the questionnaire results as analyzed by this writer, newsroom producers, directors, reporters and the general public view this issue generally the same. The answer, it seems, is one big yes . . . maybe. It depends, the statistics show, on the factors and degree of ambiguity of the circumstances involved.

Conclusions

Any and all conclusions drawn from this study must be done first with the knowledge that more in-depth research should be done before any of the findings could be considered truly conclusive.

First, newsroom staffs and their viewing audiences generally seem to see this issue of involvement similarly. While the factors on which that involvement depends may vary

more widely, the general opinion is that they should become involved, when the conditions warrant.

Secondly, there is still an underlying current among newsroom staff members that the "story" does have a certain amount of precedence on any assignment, and logically so, since their profession hinges on this fact. It seems evident, however, from the findings of this study that reporters would involve themselves more often than would producers or directors, again, as long as circumstances call for it.

Here, also, directors and reporters are more likely to intervene, the more life-threatening the situation.

Finally, one could conclude that the life-threatening factors of any situation play a greater part in a news person's intervention than does the work-level position of that newsperson.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research are primarily with the methodology of a study such as this:

1. A larger sample of television station staff and the general public should be used;

2. More consistent types of examples should be used for comparison in the experimental taped segments; and

3. The survey instrument should be more condensed and each item should assess one issue.

However, further research could also represent a continuation of the work started here. Suggestions for possible extensions of this study follows:

1. Draw some comparisons between the opinions of the public with the station that has the largest viewing audience, making inferences to the level of agreement on the issue of news crew involvement in life-threatening situations;
2. Calculate the number of these threatening events that are covered by a group of stations in a certain period of time, and the action taken in each case to determine the consistency of their actions; and
3. Help define or establish the codes or guidelines that could be used by a television station and its news department.

These recommendations are made with the knowledge that time, cost, and cooperation of subjects play major parts in the completion of any research. These suggestions may never become a reality if each of these factors does not favor the researcher.

Finally, some recommendations should be made for those working in the broadcast news industry. They are actually faced with the ethical decisions and should not be forgotten by researchers:

1. Any station's news department should establish a code or guidelines for the actions and duties of a

reporter in situations that may threaten a life. It should not be assumed that they will do the "right" thing. Morals and values vary in every individual, but every member of a television news crew should have specific responsibilities to the service of the public as well as the station;

2. If such guidelines exist, all staff members should be made clearly aware of them. When quick decisions must be made, everyone should know what is expected so that the reaction time is shorter and consistency will occur; and
3. In the case of the CBS News Standards, the CBS Network Policies and Operations Department should revise its already revised standards so they will not be violated by CBS personnel. The violation suggests that the personel involvement guideline is one to which personnel cannot easily adhere.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please place an X along the continuum to indicate your level of agreement with each statement. Place only one X on each scale. Please rate every statement.

1. The reporters at the scene of the car accident should have determined if they could help the victims first.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

2. The reporters at the scene of the car accident should have helped the victims before they shot their tape.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

3. The reporters at the scene of the car accident should have helped the victims after the story was shot.

   Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

4. The reporters did the right thing by not disturbing anything at the scene of the accident.

   Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

5. Harris and Simmons should not have turned on their lights until some authority (e.g.-policemen, etc.) arrived at the square.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

6. Harris and Simmons should have intervened sooner than they did.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

7. Harris and Simmons should have prevented Andrews from becoming ignited.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

8. Harris and Simmons should have prevented Andrews from becoming ignited once they felt sure he would be a threat to himself and possibly others.

   Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

9. The WGN crew should have rolled tape from the moment they arrived at the rescue scene.

   Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

10. It made no difference to the final value of the story that the WGN crew helped stabilize the victim's situation before they rolled tape.

    Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

11. The value of the story would have been much greater if the crew had gotten everything on tape from the first moment they arrived on the scene.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

12. If it were my decision, I would use the Andrews story before the Chicago story.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

13. Each story has equal value.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

14. Each story has equal news value and I would not prefer one over the other.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

15. Under no circumstances should news reporters personally involve themselves in a story they are covering.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

16. News reporters should get involved to help the victims of a life-threatening situation if it will not interfere with their job (i.e.-getting the story).

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

17. News reporters should sometimes get involved regardless of the story if human life is at stake depending on how threatening the circumstances.

    Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Disagree

18. News reporters should always get involved, regardless of the story, if human life is at stake.

    Strongly Agree 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B

DESCRIPTION OF THE WHMA INCIDENT AS READ TO ALL SUBJECTS

"On duty that Friday night in the newsroom of WHMA-TV were an office worker and videographer Ronald Simmons and sound Technician Gary Harris. They received three phone calls within a half hour period. The caller was Cecil Andrews, an unemployed roofer and day laborer. After WHMA had notified the police of Andrews' calls and threats to set himself on fire, Philip Cox, news director at the station, dispatched the cameramen to the location designated by Andrews.

"Harris and Simmons arrived at the Jacksonville square with their equipment. They spotted Cecil Andrews and he looked to be very drunk. By this time it was more than an hour after Andrews' original call. Harris and Simmons set up their lights and camera after they had tried to stall him briefly.

"How would you like to see someone burn?' Andrews asked as he soaked his jeans with lighter fluid. Simmons set the camera rolling as Andrews struck a match and touched it to his chest. The match went out. He put another match to his leg; it too went out. He splashed more fluid and touched another match to his left thigh. It caught and they watched the flames creep up Andrews' pant leg and then explode into a fireball. Then, Harris lurched forward to bat at flames 37 seconds after they had first rolled tape."

APPENDIX C

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE, ETA AND GAP TEST TABLES

Type I Analysis of Variance

TABLE III

TYPE I ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: NEWSROOM STAFF, AUDIENCE, AND COMPONENT OF INQUIRY

Source	df	ss	ms	F	P
Total	299	240.22	---	---	
Bet. Sbj.	59	50.19	---	---	
Bet Position Types	1	1.55	1.55	1.847	not sig.
Bet Sbj Err	58	48.64	.839	---	
W/in Sbj	240	190.03	.792	---	
Bet Comps of Inquiry	4	53.52	13.38	28.68	<.001
Interaction	4	5.24	5.24	1.31	not sig.
W/in Sbj Err	232	131.27	.565	---	
		720.66			

Post-Hoc T-tests*

$$\text{ETA} = \sqrt{\frac{50.19}{720.66}} = .2639$$

$$\text{Critical Difference} = \sqrt{\frac{2 \times .792}{30}} = \sqrt{\frac{1.584}{30}} =$$

$$.2298 \times 1.96 = \underline{.45}$$

*Fred Kerlinger defines post-hoc or ex post facto statistical research as "that research in which the independent variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable. He then studies the independent variables in retrospect for their possible relations to, and effects on, the dependent variable."

VITA[2]

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Master of Science

Thesis: A STUDY OF ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES AMONG NEWS PRODUCERS, NEWS DIRECTORS, FIELD REPORTERS AND THE VIEWING PUBLIC ON THE ETHICS OF ONE ASPECT OF ON-THE-SPOT TELEVISION NEWS GATHERING

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