

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE: NEWS COVERAGE
OF CHILD ABUSE

By

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Abstract: Every day, news professionals are tasked with making quick, difficult decisions. This thesis provides an in-depth look into how television news directors and newspaper editors decide what to report on regarding child abuse. With the help of news professionals from Oklahoma and North and West Texas, this research answers three main questions: “Is identifying a child victim ever justified?” How do news directors decide when to identify a child victim?” and “What ethical guidelines do television news directors or newspaper editors use when deciding whether to identify a child victim?” These three questions are answered with five major themes that arose from the interviews conducted: a). Do No Harm, b). Public Good, c). Age Affects Details, d). Social Media Effects, and e). Covering Child Abuse Ethically This research study provides knowledge and understanding about the decision-making process of news professionals. This thesis gives insight to journalists, newsroom managers, educators, victims of child abuse and news consumers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ethical standards are at the core of journalism. Television news directors and newspaper editors must uphold the ethics of reporting news on a daily basis. News consumers expect journalists to act ethically and honestly in their craft. According to the Society of Professional Journalists, there are four ethical principles every journalist should abide by: (a) “Seek truth and report it,” (b) “minimize harm,” (c) “act independently,” and (d) “be accountable and transparent” (“Code of Ethics,” 2014. para. 1). The Associated Press (AP) website says they normally do not identify victims of sexual abuse or “pre-teenage children who are accused of crimes or who are witnesses to them, except in unusual circumstances (para. 1).” The policy also states they do not use photos or videos that would identify the mentioned persons: “An exception would occur when an adult victim publicly identifies himself or herself (para. 1).” The AP website states managers and senior editors must be in agreement regarding exceptions. In using these principles,

journalists should know and understand what is ethical. Occasionally, however, there are situations that may be more difficult to determine what is ethical or not.

Charles Kravetz, a senior executive producer for WCVB-TV in Boston, discussed an issue he had in 1986. A 13-year-old boy had been missing for two years, and the boy's name and image were spread throughout the nation, including on milk cartons, in hopes of finding him. The day the boy was found, the news was covered on many major news stations. However, it was later revealed that the boy had been sexually abused and had endured much physical and mental abuse during the two years he was kidnapped. On the day of the trial, cameras were allowed, but Kravetz was against using the boy's name or image. Kravetz argued with his colleagues that since the boy was a victim of sexual abuse, his identity should not be revealed. But his colleagues disagreed, saying since the boy was already well-known on a national level, it was too late to preserve his identity (Kravetz, 1989). The station ran the story and revealed the boy's identity and ran video and audio of the boy describing the abuse he endured.

One former victim of child abuse said though the media was difficult to talk to at times, she promotes victims sharing their stories and sees the media as a helpful aid. Sorcha McKenna's story was featured on various media outlets, but she believed she may be a voice for those who wish to stay silent about their abuse. McKenna shared the stories about her abuse so she would have some level of mastery over what the public would know about her life (McKenna, 2002). Of all the stories the news media shared about she and her family following the abuse her father caused, McKenna (2002) said there was only one negative experience with the media. McKenna has been a strong advocate for those who speak up against their abusers and sharing their stories; she acknowledged that

many children have their childhood stolen from them, but they have the potential to help others who are involved in similar situations.

In August 2014, Sonia Kubisak was arrested for seven counts of child neglect. She and her seven children had been living in tents in northern Oklahoma for four months (King, 2015). Kubisak had used cattle wormer to treat her children's ringworm, and she often beat the kids. The oldest child, who was 17 at the time, claimed Kubisak was two different people; she was a mother part of the time, and "other times, she was Sonia" (King, 2015, p. 1). A few news stations covered the story, but one blog site shared the mugshot of Kubisak and included a picture of all seven children.

Though the oldest of Kubisak's children has been persistent in terminating her mother's rights to her children, and has been in news stories since, the issue remains in that anyone has access to a picture of the seven children inside a story about some of the worst days of their lives. By Googling Kubisak's name, one gains access to an image of her children (McCracken, 2015). With little to no effort, one can read about everything Kubisak did to harm her children.

Every day, television news directors and newspaper editors have to decide what to reveal about a child who has been the victim of abuse. Often, if a child was murdered or died due to being abused, a news outlet will reveal the age, name and sometimes a picture of the minor, such as what happened in 2018. In October of that year, multiple news outlets revealed the age, name and image of an abused and murdered child. *USA Today*, along with other news outlets, covered the story about a Mississippi grandmother who murdered her toddler granddaughter. The story identified the toddler as 20-month-old

Royalty Marie Floyd; Floyd had been stabbed and burned in an oven, and according to reports, the toddler was alive when her grandmother put her in the oven. WREG-TV in Memphis and *Daily Mail News* chose to use Floyd's picture in their coverage of the story.

Common child abuse stories that are covered by news outlets are frequently those that are extreme or rare cases. Other times, a child's name or image will appear with a story about how they were abused. Some of these stories contain many graphic details about the abuse that would put children even more at risk if they were to be identified in a news story. The qualitative research study at hand examined the policies and guidelines of how television news stations and newspapers protect or choose to release the identity of a minor. The study interviewed 15 television news directors and newspaper editors in Oklahoma and West and North Texas. The research also studied the ethical dilemma's television news directors endure when faced with making decisions about what to protect or reveal. This study looked at whether agenda-setting theory and the hierarchical model of influence plays a part in the decision-making process of news directors. The study at hand collected data and information from news directors to examine: (a) "when to reveal a child's identity," (b) "how to go about revealing a child's identity," and (c) "why revealing a child's identity would be necessary."

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

For purposes of this research, the term *abuse* is defined as “any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child” (“Violence Prevention,” 2018. para. 1). Abuse may be specifically referred to as sexual abuse or neglect in this study. In this research, a child is considered anyone under the age of 18, and the term *media* refers to all news stories, whether print, broadcast, online, magazines or tabloid television (“Media”).

History of Child Abuse News Coverage

Child abuse occurs more often than what the general public may realize; according to Weatherred (2015), there are about 40 million American adults who were victims of abuse as children. Ten percent of children in America are victims of sexual abuse before they turn 18 years old (Weatherred, 2015). However, Maydell (2018) said all forms of child abuse could potentially “cause long-term harm to the victims” (p. 711). In 2015, there were more than 1,600 fatalities of children who were victims of abuse or

neglect (“Child Abuse,” 2017, para. 4). In relation to the media, researchers found the number of news stories of sexual abuse, specifically, increased “from 185 between 1990-2001 to 3,500 between 2002-2007” (Dills & Hernandez-Julian, 2012, p. 147). According to Weatherred (2015), there is an estimated cost of \$210,000 per every U.S. child abuse victim per year, which is a higher cost than a combination of other serious health problems (p. 17). In 2012, about \$1.27 million was being spent toward aspects of child abuse per year, such as for “the criminal justice, health care and welfare systems” (Weatherred, 2015. p. 17).

Eras of Covering Child Abuse

1960s-1970s. In 2015, Weatherred outlined five different eras over the last half-century of covering child abuse in the media. “Prior to 1960, U.S. physicians, legislators and the media paid little attention to the subject of child abuse and neglect” (Weatherred, 2015. p. 19). Starting from the 1960s until 1979, the general assumption of the public was that doctors were the first to know when a child was being abused, and they were responsible for reporting the abuse to the correct authorities (Weatherred, 2015). However, after the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) passed in 1974, “media coverage of child abuse cases rose substantially” (Weatherred, 2015. p. 19).

1980s-1990s. The next era Weatherred (2015) describes is called the “Backlash” stage, which occurred in the 1980s (p. 19). The 1980s were a time when daycare facilities were being accused of child sexual abuse, which caused the public to pay more attention

to the media at the time (Weatherred, 2013; Foushee, 2002). But despite the increase in media coverage in the 1980s, the media began criticizing child protective services and blaming the system for the crimes (Weatherred, 2015). According to Weatherred (2015), the 1980s-era involved many people in denial of child abuse happening, but later the denial turned into victims speaking up against their abusers. Survivor speeches were prominent whenever the United States implemented stronger regulations against sex offenders in the early 1990s (Weatherred, 2015).

2000s. The media caught wind of stories, such as with the Catholic Church in the early 2000s, which resulted in the realization that many people attempt to mask child abuse. In 2002, the public gained knowledge about the immensity of child sexual abuse cases within the Catholic Church. When the media began sharing the stories, the public began to pay more attention to child abuse (Jones, Finkelhor & Beckwith, 2010). Because of this, people who had been involved in cases one way or another, were able to recount important information about the events (Moghaderi, 2017). The scandals led to media scrutiny of the Catholic Church, as well as to a large decline in Catholic school enrollment.

Present Day. The cover-ups eventually led to the current era of the media's increasing coverage of child abuse. Organizations such as Penn State and Boy Scouts of America became embroiled in scandal (Barrie, 2002; Weatherred, 2015). Barrie (2002) stated during the masking era, many of the children who had been abused became

“voiceless” (p. 74). But a trend toward speaking up has begun to take over again. In this era, child abuse has begun to shift toward being discussed more often, which allows for more media coverage and encourages more prevention strategies in the news (Weatherred, 2015). Though there has been more coverage as of late, the media still faces multiple criticisms in how they cover child abuse situations.

How Child Abuse is Covered Today

Journalists are encouraged to not “sugarcoat” abuse cases, but rather use specific terms to clarify what goes on in the cases (Mejia, Cheyne & Dorfman, 2012, p. 483). Often, the media covers child abuse as stories that cause the public to be aware of strangers; the problem with the stranger danger aspect in child abuse is that most abusers are known to the victims (Ayre, 2001; Dorais, 2002; Niner et al., 2013; Reid, 2002). Researchers also said if child abuse advocates would be more precise when talking to the media, then their comments in news stories may give the audience a better comprehension of what child abuse involves and why it is crucial to be an advocate for abuse prevention (Mejia et al., 2012). Researchers also encourage advocates to develop a “more positive approach” in their interaction with journalists and the media (Lonne & Parton, 2012, p. 15).

As media professionals and journalists are faced with decisions of how to produce news stories about child abuse, some ethical dilemmas must be evaluated. In her book, *News, Crime and Culture*, Wykes (2001) discussed the effects of how the media portrays

abusers, specifically citing the Fred and Rose West case. The couple had tortured and killed multiple young people, including some of their own children. The problem Wykes sees the coverage is that the media used extremely graphic terms to describe Rose West, such as “monster, likes oral sex, violent,” and so on (2001, p. 177). According to Wykes, with such detail, there is potential of more harm on the living West children; this is also one of the reasons why the media is sometimes blamed for misinterpreting child abuse stories (Wykes, 2001). News directors and newspaper editors must be careful in how much detail is given to stories about abuse in order to protect children; ethical decisions must be made on all spectrums in dealing with child abuse. Researchers say the public must also act ethically in telling and reporting to the correct authorities about child abuse cases (Feng, Chen, Fetzer, Feng & Lin, 2011).

Ess (2009) acknowledged the ethics of news coverage in child abuse cases. Ess found some news media may use children as “bait” to gain more attention to a specific story or their news site in general; once a news story involves children, people tend to be more aware of the news, as well as what’s happening around them (Ess, 2009, p. 137). Oswald, James and Nottingham (2016) also hinted to the same ideas as Ess, stating children are often portrayed in the media “as mere entertainment” (p. 202). Although a news station may not identify a child, the story involving them still has an effect on them. Ess (2009) also stated social media sites must be aware of how they portray children.

Child Abuse News Coverage Studies

Hove, Paek, Isaacson and Cole (2013) studied the portrayal of child abuse in newspapers from 2000 to 2008. In their research, they found the news media's stories misrepresented child abuse many times, whether by misreporting on a story too much or giving the impression that some of the cases were hellish and demonic, when they may not have been so severe (Hove et al., 2013). Niner, Ahmad and Cuthbert (2013) came to a similar conclusion, saying media "tends to sensationalize" stories and distort their meaning (p. 437). Franklin (2002) accused tabloid stories for generalizing some child abuse stories, and also stated television media is often too determined to capture the best image or video for a story, causing facts to be somewhat twisted. One researcher made the observation that journalists often do their work based on stereotypes, especially if the stories they are writing are about people they have had negative or little interaction with (Gaber, 2011). Stereotypes have added to the media and society's "blame culture," meaning a person must be blamed when an issue occurs (Gaber, 2011. p. 61); news media may support child sexual abuse "myths or incorrect beliefs and stereotyped assumptions about child sexual abuse, victims and perpetrators" (Popovic, 2018. p. 753).

Skidmore (1998) studied trends in how the media covers child abuse stories. For instance, Skidmore found women journalists are more willing to cover stories about child abuse than their male counterparts. The researcher also found media often gives false accounts of child abuse, making the stories more exhilarating and dramatic than they

really are. Hove et al. (2013) suggested journalists are in a tough situation when it comes to reporting on child abuse. Researchers concluded sometimes news coverage exaggerates the amount of child abuse cases because they give a relatively “large amount of coverage” to sexual abuse cases as well (Hove, et al., 2013, p. 91).

The public views each child abuse case in the media differently. For example, though neglect is the most common form of abuse, many people will see other types (e.g., sexual, physical) much more threatening to society. Because of this, many people also view neglect as more of a problem in each individual family, rather than it being a cultural issue (Hove, et al., 2013). Researchers compared the media’s misrepresentation of child abuse to that of crimes, saying the most common cases are not the most reported on (Saint-Jacques, Villeneuve, Turcotte, Drapeau, & Ivers, 2012). Hennink-Kaminski (2009) said the media tends to distort child abuse stories, claiming they leave out information that details why the abuse occurred in the first place.

In 2002, when people began reporting more cases of child abuse, particularly, sexual abuse, the media began being more attentive to what was happening (Moghaderi, 2017). Some researchers pointed out that most abuse stories that are in the media are usually unique: “When the media reports on child maltreatment, they mainly cover events that are rare, unusual, or unpleasant” (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012. p. 294).

In Favor of Child Abuse News Coverage

Though there are critics of how the media reports on child abuse, there are also those who support and encourage the coverage. Saint-Jacques et al. (2012) stated news coverage of abused children makes society acknowledge these cases and forces them to notice the urgency to alert authorities to abusive situations. When the public sees child abuse cases being covered in the media, they “feel emotionally compelled” to take action toward preventing or helping the situation (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012, p. 293). But the problem is many news stories dealing with child abuse do not provide any information about how to report abuse. Reid (2012) suggested that many journalists are passionate about sharing the truth about child abuse cases because they often have a family of their own (p. 141); he posited that journalists have good intentions in wanting to prevent child abuse by talking about it in their news stories, and Reid thought the media has a social responsibility to factually report on those stories (p. 141). Weatherred (2015) encouraged the public to report cases of child abuse, and to realize child sexual abuse, specifically, is a more rampant issue than what most people assume (p. 18). Weatherred (2013) also argued the media provides the most details about child abuse prevention, and more specifically, the media shares the most information about how to educate the public on child sexual abuse.

Some researchers suggest news media continue sharing stories about child abuse, while some may urge media to cease covering abuse stories altogether. One researcher

found the main reasons why a child abuse victim would choose to reveal his or her identity to the public. Pavlik (2008) said when a victim identifies himself or herself, it is often because they wished to have “some level of control over her or his life” (p. 238). By wanting to have “control,” a victim is the only one allowing specific information to be released. When a victim shares a personal abuse story, other victims of child abuse may be willing to share stories as well. Pavlik (2008) also agreed victims tend to speak up if they believe it will benefit other victims to do the same.

Opposition to Child Abuse News Coverage

There are some scholars who have pointed out the negative effects of covering child abuse cases in the news. Jones, Finkelhor and Beckwith (2010) posited that most child abuse victims are worried about the chance that their stories will be published to the public; the researchers also found one study where victims of rape claimed they would be more willing to tell authorities about their trauma if there was no chance of the media reporting on it. In their research of child victims and newspaper coverage, the researchers found numerous amounts of information that identified the child victims, even though the newspapers had guidelines stating they would not reveal identities of child and sexual victims (Jones, Finkelhor & Beckwith, 2010).

Ayre (2001) criticized journalists, saying they are not honest in how they report, but that they are more concerned with making stories that will “sell” and have a sensational storyline (p. 889). Maydell (2018) also faulted the media for being “obsessed”

with melodramatic stories of child abuse that are either graphic or explicit (p. 708). Ayre (2001) also recognizes the media is not necessarily in the business of attacking child abuse advocates, but in the business of drawing an audience and increasing their ratings. Lonne and Parton (2014) suggested the media often does not think prevention information is something that should be included in a news story, especially when the stories have potential to cause considerable outrage from the public. Maydell (2018) claimed media are quick to assign guilt and tends to share exaggerated stories; Society can sometimes place blame on itself, but it is better for the public if the media blames only one person instead (Maydell, 2018). Davies et al., (2017) recommended those who are advocates of child welfare would benefit from working more on communications to tell people how to help victims of child abuse, rather than on how the media portrays the issue to the public.

The Right to be Forgotten

The right to be forgotten is the term used to describe an individual's capability to delete, confine or correct any online information about them that is false or causes shame and guilt (Kelly & Satola, 2017). In 2009, a European Union (EU) judge ruled in the favor of the right to be forgotten (Oswald, et al., 2016), making it a matter of law. The case came about when a man claimed that articles about crimes he had committed should not be available on Google.com whenever his name is put into the search engine. The case resulted in the court deciding it is possible to make such claims online be gone from

Google.com forever. The right to be forgotten was implemented in the EU 2014 ruling of *Google Spain SL, Google Inc. v. Agencia Española de Protección de Datos, Mario Costeja González* (the case is also known as *Google Spain v. AEPD*). In the decision, the judge clarified the right does not get disregarded simply because a child is in question, and there does not have to be proof of damage for a child to be granted the right to be forgotten (Oswald, et al, 2016). Whatever is in the “best interest” of the child is what the courts try to uphold; the decision in *Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA* maintained this fact, stating some children are able to make his or her own decisions, no matter what the parents may believe (Oswald, et al., 2016, p. 209). Despite what benefits parents may gain from releasing information to the media, children may not have the same effective outcome.

The right allows anyone, under certain circumstances, to delete all personal information from data bases and start anew under a new name and identity (Rees & Heywood, 2014). Some researchers have suggested children know about this right and use it, as long as they have been deemed cognitively able to make that decision (Oswald et al., 2016). Oswald, et al (2016) suggested if children exercise this right, then they will be greatly protected from harm on social media sites, following any story the media shares about them or their family. The right to be forgotten prevents any spread of details of someone’s life, and is intended to reduce harm (Newman, 2015).

The right to be forgotten is strictly EU policy, though the U.S. has similar laws that protect privacy of victims, witnesses and perpetrators in specific crimes. However, in some privacy court cases (*Smith v. Daily Mail Pub. Co.*, *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*, *Florida Star v. B.J.F.*), the U.S. Supreme Court has sided with the media, claiming, “the First and Fourteenth Amendments prevail over the interests of privacy for information that is already part of the public record,” (Kelly & Satola, 2017. p. 33). In cases of sexual assault, however, some U.S. states prevent news media from revealing the identity of rape victims, at least before a trial, such as in the case of *M.G. v. Time Warner, Inc.* Nonetheless, the Supreme Court has yet to make any decisions that will always protect privacy or the First Amendment. The passage of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act led to Congress to explicitly requesting news media to act ethically in respecting the privacy of rape victims, without having his or her consent (Kelly & Satola, 2017).

Agenda-Setting Theory and Hierarchical Model of Influences

Some suggest coverage of child abuse cases can benefit the public and future victims as well. Ho and Chan (2018) claimed that if news media would cover more child abuse stories, it would “raise awareness wildly,” “expose system failures” and encourage the public to “taking action” (p. 63). Researchers also believe this is reflected by agenda-setting theory, in that what the media posits to be an important issue in society, will also

become important to the public and may lead to the public getting involved in preventing child abuse from happening more often (Ho & Chan, 2018).

Mass media is writing and sharing stories around the clock about events and news going on in the U.S. and the world. The media has a significant amount of power and influence in the daily lives of all citizens. Television and newspapers contribute to how the public views child abuse (Davies et al., 2017). In 1972, McCombs and Shaw originated the agenda-setting theory, suggesting how the media sways public opinion. The theory is the idea that the media determines what people will think about, but will not determine what people think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this theory, the idea is things that are important to the media will eventually become important to the public. (McCombs, 2005; Vargo & Guo, 2017). The theory's concept is that the media has "the power to influence their audience's thinking and to offer the audience the most important topics (Pavelka, 2014. p. 626). Strömbäck (2011) agreed the media has a significant influence in society, saying, "If people think the media are powerful, they will behave as if the media are powerful – regardless of whether the perception is correct or not" (p. 427). Though the media impacts society, everyone acts on the media's influence in their own way. One person may feel a need to do a charitable act from reading a news story, but another story may cause someone else to stop voting. This theory posits that the important stories or headlines in the media influences to what extent the public considers a story important (Popovic, 2018). According to McCombs (2005), agenda-setting looks at what knowledge the public gains from the media, but takes note that every individual

learns differently, so the message effects may influence each person to another degree. Lonne and Parton (2014) also acknowledged the dominance the media has on the public, saying the media can draw awareness to child abuse, but can also spoil the authenticity and credibility of media professionals.

Rao (2008) stated the media's agenda has had an influence on the public's opinion of child abuse, such as in the Aiyana Gauvin case, where a four-year old was abused and killed by her mother and her mother's boyfriend. Though child abuse has occurred for many years, it was rarely discussed in the media until the 1950s and 1960s (Nelson, 1984). In *Making an Issue of Child Abuse*, Nelson (1984) stated child abuse had become an issue in public policy, and believed the media's agenda-setting ways were what would determine what the government was going to do about child abuse cases in the 1970s. Popovic (2018) found that when the public recalls sex crimes, they typically are thinking about child sexual abuse specifically and about the perpetrators' punishment. Many other studies have concluded similar ideas, though did not specifically discuss agenda-setting theory (Hove et al., 2013; Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995; Lonne & Gillespie, 2014; Niner et al., 2013; Popovic, 2018).

Kitzinger, who studied the publicity of child abuse, came to the conclusion that although the media cannot be completely blamed for the lack of prevention efforts of child abuse, the media can do more to include information about policies and programs in their stories (Kitzinger, 1995). The media's power to influence thoughts is often overlooked, but Temoney (2008) suggested the power can have a significant effect on

those who make policies regarding child abuse. “With the capacity to both tell readers what matters to think about and how to think about them, the media has the potential to influence the public through shaping public opinion and the decision-makers by informing them of what the public is thinking” (Temoney, 2008. p. 15). Temoney (2008) also stated that although the media has apparent power, its power is also dependent on every individual case and situation. However, the public continues to gain information from the media and, in turn, forms their opinions and thoughts based on the circumstances of each occurrence.

Popovic (2018) found that most studies in social sciences, (e.g. media, psychology, and criminology) only look at one theory, but suggested further research should involve multiple theories, specifically agenda-setting and framing; Cassidy (2003) researched influences of gatekeeping and the hierarchical model of influences. For this research, the hierarchical model of influences will be an additional theory considered alongside agenda-setting. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) proposed the hierarchical model of influences. The researchers presented five levels of influences on media content: a) social systems; b) social institutions; c) media organizations; d) routine practices; and e) individual characteristics. Voakes (1997) used a framework that was derived from Shoemaker and Reese’s model and found that journalists’ ethical decisions are based on “intrinsic motivations” (e.g. religion or potential for advancement in their career) or “external heuristics” (e.g. disciplinary threats or ethical guidelines in the workplace) (p. 21). However, at the end of the study, Voakes (1997) had found there is a hierarchy of

factors that influence journalists decision making, stating that individual influences are the most prominent, though these influences are not always based on values and morals.

The hierarchy model suggests that the five levels influence and shape media content: individual, routine practices, organizational, extramedia and social systems (Reese, 2016). The journalist, news director or editor, which is the *individual*, has the most significant effect on media content (Blankenship, 2016). The individual's work is guided by the *routine practices* of the newsroom, which are implemented by the *media organization* where the individual works (Blankenship, 2016), where ownership of the company becomes involved. Influences such as conflicts of interest may be a result of media owners promoting in the newsroom, whether they realize it or not (Ekayanti & Xiaoming, 2018). Ownership heavily influences media content, and the organizations are influenced by *extramedia*, which are influences outside of the media environment, such as politics and education systems (Ekayanti & Xiaoming, 2018). The extramedia then influences the *ideology*, which Shoemaker and Reese (1996) describe as, "a symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in society" (p. 221). The ideology level is affected by factors such as values in the economy or individual achievement (Cassidy, 2003). The model considers all facets involved in the media and provides a guide to how those media are impacted by each of the different levels; Reese (2016) found that journalistic research can easily be categorized into the five levels in the model. This model has not been used to study child abuse coverage in past research.

Research Questions

In most cases, media professionals strive to keep victims from more harm (Pavlik, 2008). The media are often responsible for how the public perceives child abuse cases, and in covering those stories, journalists must act ethically and respectfully. Pavlik (2008) noted if journalists wish to identify a victim, they need to do two things: (a) have consent from the victim, and (b) be sure the victim knows what information will be available to the public and knows any potential harms or benefits of revealing his or her identity. Having the victim's consent helps the victim know what may happen once people know his or her identity. Many victims could be victimized more in the future or always be disturbed by having their name and face in public matched with a story of abuse. If a victim is going to be a source for the media, he or she must know that whatever information is released may be accessible to the public forever (Pavlik, 2008).

Three questions will be considered in this research. The goal of the questions is to gain knowledge of how current journalists decide what and how child abuse stories may be covered in a news story. The first research question tries to establish a general conclusion about television news directors' and newspaper editors' thoughts about news coverage of child abuse. Ess (2009) accused news outlets of using child abuse cases to lure in public attention, but also said coverage of such stories makes citizens more conscious of their surroundings.

RQ 1: Is identifying a child victim ever justified?

The second research question seeks to determine what elements newspaper editors and television news directors consider before identifying a child in a news story. Pavlik (2008) believed the most reasonable time to identify a child victim is whenever the victim wishes to share his or her story with the public. Ho and Chan (2018) believed more news media coverage of child abuse would be beneficial to more people by raising awareness to the cause. However, there are other researchers who have found increased coverage would be harmful to the victims (Jones, Finkelhor & Beckwith, 2010), while some believe coverage of child abuse stories are only for news outlets to gain better ratings or used for clickbait (Ayre, 2001; Maydell, 2018).

RQ 2: How do news directors decide when to identify a child victim?

The final research question looks into the ethics of print and television newsrooms represented in this study. The question is asked to analyze the ethics of news directors and editors, as well as the ethics expected in their respective newsrooms. Some researchers have acknowledged the media's ethics in whether it chooses to provide information such as phone numbers or websites to help prevent child abuse (Lonne & Parton, 2014; Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995). Weatherred (2013), however, believed the news media is a key factor in making the public aware of child abuse cases.

RQ 3: What ethical guidelines do television news directors or newspaper editors use when deciding whether to identify a child victim?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As discussed above, news coverage of child abuse has its advantages and disadvantages (Hennink-Kaminski, 2009; Pavlik, 2008). News professionals often have to make quick decisions about whether or not they should run a story. These decisions also involve how much information they are willing to provide to the audience, such as giving the name or image of a child (Hove, Paek, Isaacson & Cole, 2013; Skidmore, 1998). To analyze how news professionals decide whether to identify a victim of child abuse, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with television news directors and newspaper editors in Oklahoma and North and West Texas. In-depth interviews are an effective way of understanding the decision-making process in choosing what to keep private or what to share with the public about child abuse cases. In-depth interviews are generally used to describe personal beliefs or to gain knowledge on delicate topics, such as child abuse (Hennink et al., 2011). For purposes of this research, television news directors are the media professionals in charge of a broadcast news department, and newspaper editors are those in charge of the print news department.

When conducting qualitative research, the interviewer must listen intently so an audience believes the interviewee is being truthful (Floreczak, 2017). Hennink et al. (2011) discussed the ethics of conducting qualitative research. The researchers stated that in order to hold ethical interviews, the researcher must: (a) have consent from participants, (b) allow the interviewees to determine their rights, (c) ask questions that cause little to no harm, (d) allow for participant's anonymity, and (e) never disclose private information at any given time. Some researchers have addressed the question of whether people should believe qualitative research. Some scholars believe qualitative research trumps quantitative approaches because it relies on people's beliefs and opinions; More recent research would be more beneficial for studying qualitative research. However, Miller and Dingwall (1997) said qualitative research "cannot be intent on using techniques and methodologies," saying, "Its quality lies in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity" (p. 19).

Sample

For this research, 15 full-time newspaper editors and television news directors were interviewed either by phone or face-to-face. Of the 15 interviewed, 10 were television news directors and 5 were newspaper editors. Twelve to 20 interviews is a common number among qualitative research and among mass communications specifically (Besley & Roberts, 2010; Fröhlich et al., 2013; Macnamara, 2016). Besley

and Roberts (2010), Fröhlich et al. (2013) and Macnamara (2016) all used 18 to 20 people in their qualitative interviews. All subjects were from Oklahoma and North and West Texas newspapers and television stations. Television news directors and newspaper editors were chosen because they have had years of experience in the news industry and have dealt with the topic of child abuse coverage multiple times, and have also been the managers making the decisions of what to share about child abuse cases with the public. The participants' ages range from 32 to 62, and each has been in the news industry anywhere from 10 to 40 years. The participants chosen were those who have had the opportunity to write or oversee many news stories throughout the years, whether as reporters starting in their careers, or more recently as directors and editors. Oklahoma and North and West Texas news editors and directors were chosen because of benefits in proximity to the researcher for face-to-face interviews. Of the 15 interviewed, 3 were women.

Interview Process

Face-to-face interviews are the best way to conduct in-depth interviews. Speaking to someone face-to-face allows the researcher to see expressions and clearly depict the tone of voice used while questions are being answered. However, because of time constraints for the participants, many opted for their interview to be conducted over the phone; 13 participants opted for a phone interview. All interviews were held in private. All participants signed a consent form, but they may withdraw from of the study at any

time (see Consent Form in Appendix B). The consent form was approved by the Institutional Review Board before it was given to the subjects. Interviewees were notified they were going to be recorded if they chose to do an interview. Interviewees were also reminded before the interview that they would be recorded. All comments made by the interviewees are confidential and their names or workplaces were not mentioned in the transcript of the study. The only identifiers used are whether they work for television or print, as well as male or female identifiers. The interviews conducted were completely voluntary and no one was required to participate. There was no compensation or reward given to any of the participants in this study.

Because of the seriousness of child abuse, there was potential for some risk in participating in an interview. If a news editor or director has dealt with any cases of covering child abuse or personal abuse, he or she could have experienced similar feelings of anguish or sadness. With these risks in mind, interviewees were able to decline to answer any questions he or she was uncomfortable with. The researcher acknowledged the risks of discussing such a sensitive subject, but the information learned provides basis for future news professionals whenever child abuse stories are being discussed and decisions are having to be made.

Instrument

The newspaper editors and television news directors were asked a series of questions, including follow-up questions, in face-to-face or phone interviews. The

researcher took notes, as well as record the audio for transcription. Fröhlich et al. (2013) asked five to six additional questions to their main questions and a similar process was done in for this research. Research Question 1 was “Is identifying a child victim ever justified?” For this question interviewees were asked the following: “How can you justify publishing a child abuse story?” and “What type of stories are you more likely to identify a child in?” The second research question was “How do news editors and directors decide when to identify a child victim?” The following questions were asked in reference to Research Question 2: “What steps have to be taken before identifying a child abuse victim?” and “What are benefits and what are problems that come with choosing to identify a child victim?” After the first six questions are asked, the interviewer moved to the ethical discussion. The final research question is “What ethical guidelines do news directors use when deciding whether or not to identify a child victim?” The following were asked: “How can a news director’s or editor’s personal ethical beliefs override a reporter’s or the audience’s ethical values?” and “Where do you draw the line of what is deemed unethical when choosing to identify a victim of child abuse?” Follow-up questions were asked throughout the interview session, and after all questions were asked, interviewees were able to add any comments they wished. The researcher also checked the recording following the interview to make sure all recorded dialogue is accounted for.

Credibility and Verification

The researcher established credibility through the writing of the text, including use of direct quotes of the interview subjects. “Credibility refers to the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher” (Cope, 2014. p. 89). Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) acknowledged a specific way for proving credibility in qualitative research, stating, “Criteria developed for use in qualitative studies rely heavily on presenting the results to those who were studied and asking them to verify whether or not they agree with them” (p. 378). After all data was transcribed, the researcher allowed each interviewee to review his or her information that is being used in the study, as well as the quotes that are used in the text of the research; participants then verified whether the findings are credible (Cope, 2014). Researchers suggest the best practice of establishing credibility is whenever the participants deem the findings worthy of being included in the research (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999).

Metzger et al. (2003) identified five components of verification in qualitative research: “accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency and coverage” (p. 282). For this study, the researcher established verification by sharing the transcript of answers to the interviewees before publication. Using member checks contributed to the validity of the information provided by the subjects. The subjects have confirmed the interpretation of what comments are being used in the text; subjects reviewed the edited transcript to be

certain their words were accurately translated into writing. Participants were listed as “Participant 1” and so on, to “Participant 15,” in no particular order.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Fifteen television news directors and newspaper editors were interviewed either over the phone or in person for this research. These news professionals were all from television or newspaper stations throughout Oklahoma and North and West Texas. The findings were consistent with agenda-setting and the hierarchical model of influences, as well as previous research investigating coverage of child abuse cases. The following findings establish five major themes during the research portion of the study: a) Do No Harm, b) Public Good, c) Age Affects Details, d) Social Media Effects, and e) Covering Child Abuse Ethically.

Do No Harm

The idea of “do no harm” is that many news professionals do not want to cause any harm to a person’s mental, physical or emotional health, especially if the person involved is under the legal age of 18. Every participant in the study said his or her newsroom starts from a position of avoiding identifying child abuse victims. Participant 9 (male), who has worked in newsrooms in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, said one of the reasons to not identify child victims is simple: “It doesn’t benefit anyone to know the name of a kid that’s been abused.” As the participant pointed out, many of those

interviewed specified that if a newsroom does a story about child abuse, the goal is to make the story about what happened and the legal outcome, rather than the abused child.

All participants said their goal is to conceal the identity of a child victim, but some said such decisions depend on the situation. Participant 7 (male) said his newsroom has three basic goals: “One is to inform the public. The second is to hold people of power or position accountable, and the third is do no harm and that’s the one that gets us in trouble sometimes.” This news professional is referring to the reactions the news station gets from the public. The public usually has their own opinions of whether something is harmful. Often in child abuse situations, identifying a parent or where a child goes to school could identify the child. Participant 3 (female) said, “Sometimes identifying a mother also identifies a child, so we take great pains in making sure no harm comes to the child because identifying a mom usually identifies a child.” Some news professionals expressed their interest in trying to keep the public away from being able to identify a child victim, while others said those situations cannot be prevented. Participant 5 (female) said, “Harm to the child is a concern, whether that’s something at school with someone teasing them, also if that person gets acquitted then comes after the child, those are definite concerns.” Participant 6 (male) said his newsroom tries its best to avoid identifying victims of child abuse:

Typically if you have the name of a school or a daycare for that matter anything along those lines obviously there are hundreds of students there so, could it get narrowed down? Yes. But it would take someone a lot of due diligence to do that. We stay vague with our information so it won’t get narrowed down, and that’s part of what we look at when we look at our stories before they air... but I always try and have my staff try and look at it and say, ‘If you didn’t know anything

about this story and you read this could, you identify that person? This news professional specified how his newsroom makes sure to not identify children, and to avoid publishing something that might lead to revealing a child's identity; this is one of the steps news outlets take to be sure they are acting ethically in what they report.

Another reason television news directors and newspaper editors choose to not identify child abuse victims is because there is a potential for the child to suffer more trauma. Participant 5 (female) said, "I would rather not air a story than put a child at risk or risk of damaging their mental health." This news professional believes that putting a child at risk of harm is enough to not cover a story. Most of those interviewed do not want to "re-traumatize" the victims in any way. Participant 1 (male, 39) said, "The number one reason we don't identify them is because they could experience that trauma over and over again and feel shame when they're in public or at school and that's what we try to avoid." Participant 2, who has been a news editor for seven years, said it is harmful to identify a child abuse victim, especially since the children are still growing and learning. Participants 1 and 2 want to be sure the stories they cover do not a) cause a child to experience the trauma again, and b) cause people in the community to harm a child in any way. Participant 8 (male) came to a similar conclusion:

I think the biggest concern is there's a potential for re-victimization. If you have a young child who's a victim of some crime, how does it serve our reader to let them know who this is? How damaging is it for this to be known by their peers, where they go to church, where they go to school, people in their neighborhood who could say this person was a victim of abuse or some kind of crime. How do

those costs outweigh any potential benefit you get from identifying any young person?

Again, television news directors and newspaper editors do not want to cause any further harm to a child abuse victim in any way; they also do not want their stories to make a community know who the abused child is. Along the lines of re-traumatizing a child abuse victim, news professionals are aware that by identifying a child, that child is labeled a victim.

Participant 7 (male): You've stigmatized that child to being an abuse victim. They didn't choose that. They're not coming forward to testify. You don't cover children in court when they testify. You don't... it's just something you try not to do. They have to go back to school. They have to live their lives as a victim of abuse, so to me there's really no good in it.

Participant 7 wanted to make it clear that since a child does not choose to be a victim, there would be no reason to cover his or her story; to this news director, there is no benefit to revealing a child's identity. A couple of news directors said the way child abuse stories are written are determined by the community, and whatever details the community considers too gruesome or unethical, is how the newsroom determines what to share. Participant 9 used Las Vegas as an example: "Surprisingly Vegas is still fairly conservative away from the glitz and glamour of The Strip and it is family oriented, but people there are more willing to... I guess they expect more dirt. They want all the salacious details in most cases, whereas here most people are like, 'Tell me the facts. I don't need the details.'" Participant 9 thought there is a clear distinction between the news media in more conservative states and areas, versus those who are not. People living in

Los Angeles may expect news stories to have more salacious details than those living in Oklahoma City.

Participant 13 (male), who used to be on the board of a child's advocacy center said his newsroom was told by the center's experts what to do in regards to identifying child abuse victims. This is an example of how people or organizations within a community may influence what the media reports about child abuse cases.

We don't name the alleged victim. That's always kind of been one of those things working with children's advocacy centers. They told us you don't identify them, certainly by name, then if there are other identifiers that are other things that may identify the child. We try to avoid those if at all possible including if they were related to the child or what their relationship was with the alleged abuser.

Many times the abuser is someone related to the victim, or the victim's family knows the abuser; this is the type of situation Participant 13 described, saying his newsroom tries to avoid all identifiers that could reveal the child's identity. The study at hand interviewed participants who live in part of the area often referred to as "The Bible Belt," and what people in the communities in Oklahoma and Texas consider to be unethical could be considered ethical in other regions of the country and the world. Participant 9 (male) said, "I think it's really based on how the community operates and what the community thinks are standards of decency." This news professional believes the public has a lot of input in what the news media considers to be ethical; the community affects what the news media covers and the media influences the public's thoughts.

Another aspect of "do no harm" is the idea that news professionals are having to make a conscientious effort to not take advantage of abuse victims. Participant 11 (male,

62) said, "I don't want the child or the family to feel we exploited the child for any reason. The child is a victim of crime. The story isn't about who the victim is. The story is about who the perpetrator is and what they're accused of having done and I think focusing on that side of the equation is important." One goal of the media is not only to protect the victim, but to also protect the victim's family. The news media wants child abuse stories to be less about the victim and more about what has happened.

Legal Documents Needed. Some news professionals pointed out although they may leave out most of the graphic details of a child abuse story, the online version of the story may have additional links to more information. Participant 9 (male) said, "Just because it's going on the web doesn't mean you don't have to follow the same rules as it does when it's going on TV," but he continued by saying there may be times when the website does contain more information about a story:

If it's not fit for TV, it's not fit for the Web. Now, the exception to that is when we will take the police report and put it on the web and we'll say on air 'for the full details on the police report go to our website.' In that case, we don't really edit the police report. If someone wants to open it and read it or the affidavit, then they are taking the step of inquiring, whereas we're not taking the step of informing.

Other news professionals also stated they would put a police report on the website, but if they do not, the legal documents would have still had to have been obtained by the newsroom at some point before writing the story. Having documents such as police reports or affidavits helps the news professionals be sure what is being reported on is factual. Knowing the facts from legal documents could help the news professionals be

sure they are not accusing someone who is not responsible for a crime, or help protect the child victim. Participant 11 (male) said the facts have to check out with the documents available in order to cover the case ethically.

Typically, there will be police reports or probable cause affidavits, arrest reports, etcetera, which give a lot of detail about those incidents. We would always endeavor to make sure that our reporting is accurate based on the information that's available, so, again, when I said 'do no harm,' I wouldn't want to do any harm to anybody who was accused, especially if there was any suggestion that there's any question about the accusation, so don't allow someone to be accused unjustly.

This news director clarified that journalists usually report the facts from the legal documents they have obtained; by making sure the reporting is factual, the news professionals are sure to not also harm the suspect or accuse someone who is innocent.

Participant 4 (male), who has been in the news industry over 20 years, said the legal documents are always required whenever someone comes into a newsroom wanting to share his or her story: "If there's not an official police report or official arrest, then you're getting into the weeds of the he said/she said because again, while you want to protect the child, you don't want to throw somebody else under the bus who doesn't deserve that." It is important for newsrooms to not simply take someone's story as truth, but to make sure legal documents are acquired before writing a story.

Public Good

The television news directors and newspaper editors interviewed all agreed that what they do and what they report on is for public safety. Participant 8 (male) said, “Situations of public safety you need to take into account when you’re looking at your policy on identification.” Many of the news professionals said they want to protect the public as well as the victim, and by protecting the public, that may mean sharing stories about child abuse.

Participants 2 and 11 discussed how important public good is when covering child abuse stories. Participant 2 (female) stated the public good must be considered in relation to potential harm in any news story, as well as stories about child abuse.

Basically, any story we’re doing we want to balance the public good with the possible harm. Even if a story could have some public good, if there’s at least some harm you could cause, you don’t want that. So when we’re talking about child abuse, obviously stopping child abuse is a public good, and sometimes that will require bringing to light that it is happening.

Participant 11 (male) stated that despite the story being about child abuse, it still involves people of the community, therefore, it should be shared.

I think it’s in the public’s best interest to know, if indeed a child’s been hurt or if there’s someone who is legitimately accused of doing so. It involves the police, the courts and your tax dollars to investigate and prosecute, and I think any of those things make it the public interest... I think the public interest in knowing this to understand that bad things can happen to people and we’ve got to do what

we can to protect the most vulnerable among us and children are among the most vulnerable.

News professionals believe they are obligated to serve the public which may at times, be difficult. It is beneficial to keep in mind how many people from the public and community are involved in a child abuse case: law enforcement, victim's and suspect's families, taxpayers, lawyers and health care providers. With having so many parties affected, communities should be aware of the things happening around them, especially if a child is involved.

Participant 1 said child abuse stories are typically justified "as a sort of service to the public to know who these people are." Many of the news professionals interviewed said they have to have discussions in their newsrooms and ask questions of each other about how each story will benefit the public. Participant 8 (male) said questions asked in the newsroom are many:

How does this particular information serve our readers? If it doesn't serve our readers to identify someone who is affected or involved in a particular crime, we need to ask ourselves, 'Do we even need to identify this person? Do we need to talk about where they live or particular circumstances?' But sometimes just because you know something doesn't mean you should report something.

Missing Child Cases. Whenever a child is missing, the news media will often put his or her name and image into the public so there can be more people on the lookout for the missing child. This is an instance of when news professionals are typically okay with identifying a child because according to the facts at the time, the child has not been

abused. However, there are times whenever a missing child is found, then it is revealed that the child had been abused. One of the news directors interviewed said he had been in a similar situation years ago, and his news director at the time decided to stop using the name and image of the child who had been missing and was abused. Participant 4 (male) said, “My thought was you can’t put the genie back in the bottle because it’s already out there. Maybe if I’d been older I would have agreed more and they’re parents and I’m not, so definitely has something to do with it.” As stated, television news directors and newspaper editors believe they have learned over their years in the news industry about handling difficult situations. News professionals are influenced by the communities they have worked in, their reporting experiences, and by simply being parents themselves. Participant 4 said his opinion on the situation years ago may be different than his opinion now, or if he was a parent. Participant 7 (male) agreed that in a missing child case, it is beneficial to reveal the child’s identity in hopes of finding the child. Participant 7 said if a child’s safety is at risk, then the child would need to be identified, however, if it is later revealed that the child had been abused, the newsroom would have a discussion about whether to stop reporting the child’s identity at all. “Probably in a predator situation or something where the safety of the child or an example would be if the child was kidnapped and we’re looking for that child, I’m going to have to identify them, and anything that would involve further safety issues I would identify a child.” Identifying a missing child has been helpful in many stories, such as the 2018 stories about Jayme Closs, the missing Wisconsin child who was found weeks later to be safe. There have been times when a missing child is later found to have been abused, however, and news

professionals interviewed for this study said they usually opt to take the risk if revealing the child's identity may save him or her from harm.

Making Suspects Known. Another aspect of public good is making the community aware of who the suspects are. Participant 5 (female) suggested the idea of not only trying to serve the public, but also protect the public, especially in cases when the suspect is a public figure, "If it's a school bus driver or something like that it's something the public needs to be aware of, but if it's not something that's going to protect the public in any way, shape or form, we have to weigh that out." Participant 5 wanted to be certain that if a child abuse cases is reported on, it needs to be beneficial to the public for the story to be justified. One news professional said letting people know who the suspect is may help other people be more comfortable with sharing his or her story, or simply find comfort in knowing he or she is not alone.

Participant 15 (male): If it's a horrific case that's going to get a lot of attention and get a lot of people upset. It kind of all depends. We do more kind of sex crimes against children from adults and kind of put those stories out there to let people know this is happening. Here's this picture of the suspect and in a few cases, people have seen a picture of the suspect, and we find out it's happened to more people once we do a story on them.

What the participant is suggesting is that if more people know who a suspect is, it could be beneficial to former abuse victims who may want to share his or her story. The idea of victims sharing their stories is discussed in a later theme.

Community Norms. A final facet of public good is community norms, or the beliefs and values of the people in a given area. As mentioned above, the participants of this study are in what is considered the “Bible Belt,” which is made up of people who are more conservative than other parts of the nation. Participant 9 said, “There’s still going to be cases where we have to tell horrible stories... We have to give enough detail for people to understand that [the suspects] are in real trouble, but you don’t need to get into the dirty details as deeply.” In Oklahoma and Texas, it is more common for child abuse stories to simply give enough information for the public to know what charges are being made, or what people can do if they know of these cases, rather than giving salacious details. One news director said his station will do issue pieces about child abuse awareness and prevention, rather than reporting on the abuse story itself.

Participant 15 (male): In the community when there’s crimes against children, and it’s a growing trend, we do issues more and get people the resources to go to if this is happening to you, give teachers things to look out for if there’s a student who’s acting different or coming in with bruises. So for us it’s more of an issue piece more than what happened. Usually on Facebook and everything, people appreciate it and the agency we usually talk to, whether it’s the children’s advocacy center or something like that, just letting people know they’re out there to help victims.

Participant 15 (male) acknowledged that in his area, the community is more accepting of the issue pieces his newsroom does. He said the public often comments on social media saying they are grateful for this type of news coverage. These situations help the community become helpful in preventing child abuse. Participant 14 (male) said he hopes

other newsrooms in Oklahoma and Texas also value getting information about child abuse to the public, while also “protecting the minors as best as we can.”

Age Affects Details

Regarding how age plays a part in the reporting of child abuse cases, a variety of answers were given, with some television news directors and newspaper editors saying age does not change anything to saying it does determine how stories are covered.

Participant 8 (male) questioned how age might influence the newsroom’s reporting, but said it most likely is a factor.

The age is a consideration. I would guess that the age is something you would consider. I think you’d think differently about someone who was 3 years old versus someone who’s 16 years old. Again, we tend to err on the side of protecting people, protecting victims, and that’s what we’ve learned over the years.

This news professional suggests that although the newsroom would still keep an abuse victim’s identity protected, they might be more willing to include more details in the story that is published on air or online. Participant 11 (male) had a similar conclusion, saying the age of the victim would likely be a factor in the reporting as well:

Age could be a factor, and I say that because if it’s a preschool age child then if that child is known beyond his or her own household versus if it’s a school age child, then the child is obviously in a social circumstance. Again, if you’re talking about an eight-year-old child, an eight-year-old doesn’t watch newscasts, but the parents do, and we don’t want to give that child that exposure.

Participant 11 concluded that though a child may not pay attention to the media, there are adults who do watch or read the news and the child could be at risk of mental or emotional harm. Although these news professionals continue to strive toward protecting victims' identities, some said they are willing to release the age of the victim, if it is available. Participant 6 (male) said sharing the age of the victim may be in the public interest: "If an official has given us an age, we go with that. Typically we will go with their age. I think this helps in the process of giving out the information if we're giving out information in a story about the 'sexual abuse of a seven-year-old' it helps put it into context of what that person is facing when it comes to an accusation." This news director thought saying the age of the child victim may help the public understand the seriousness of the crime. Some news professionals said the age of the victim will likely be released if he or she is a teenager. Participant 2 (female) said, "Sometimes we'll be a little more specific with teenagers. We'll say the 17-year-old or 15-year-old, where we'll just say 'toddler' for younger children." Participant 9 (male) said, "The age of the victim does play into it. If the kid is 17, we're going to be less likely to be cautious than if the kid was four. I think that is a factor." These news professionals believe releasing the age of a child victim may help the audience better understand a story because the gravity of the charges differ depending on the age of the victim.

Most of the television news directors and newspaper editors interviewed said the factor of victim's age affects how they cover a story if he or she is a juvenile, but once the victim is an adult, the way a story is covered may vary. While news professionals tend to never identify a sexual abuse victim, whether juvenile or adult, many said they would be willing to identify an adult victim if he or she were to request to share his or her

story. Participant 10 (male) added the newsroom would be more than willing to listen to an adult abuse victim, verify the story, then share the story with the public if that is what the adult wanted:

If it's an adult and they want to come forward and talk about their experience as a survivor of abuse, obviously we verify the story to the best of our ability. But if someone comes forward and wants to share their story, we're definitely going to listen. And if they're of legal age and if they're willing to share their story for education and awareness purposes, that's definitely something we'll consider and check the facts. We're not going to let someone share their story before we verify the authenticity of it.

Participant 10 (male) said the facts have to be checked out before allowing an adult victim to share his or her story; this would keep people in the community from sharing their domestic disputes from the media, as well as keep "he said/ she said" arguments out of the public eye. Participant 2 (female) came to a similar conclusion as Participant 10, saying if an adult wished to share his or her story, the news professionals have to make sure the victim has "a full understanding" of what could happen once his or her story is available to the public:

Just because we report it doesn't mean we help with justice. Some people still want to [put their name out there] especially when we're talking with adult victims of abuse, such as sexual or misconduct. Sometimes they feel like if the public hears their own story, then it will generate more public awareness. Some people think they'll want to [share their story], but that's something we want to

make sure they understand. Ethically, it's our responsibility to help them understand, but just because you want to do a public good doesn't mean it will fix anything.

Participant 2 wanted to make the point that if a newsroom shares a story, the news coverage will not influence legal decisions; anyone wanting to share his or her story only to make the accused have a more serious punishment should acknowledge that would not be beneficial.

Recent News Encourages Others. One news director looked at identifying adult victims differently, since they would be the ones going to the news media and requesting to share his or her story. Participant 4 (male) said, "...That's their choice as adults. They're making adult decision. I think it's I'm not identifying them. They're coming to me." The idea of adult victims coming forward to share their stories with the public is a common theme as of late, which many of these news professionals pointed out. Many of the television news directors and newspaper editors said the recent scandals in the news about the Catholic Church, Southern Baptist Church and the release of the Michael Jackson documentary are being discussed now because of adult victims who have decided to share their story. Participant 5 (female) said she will listen to a person who wants to talk about his or her story as a victim because many others are encouraged to speak up after one person does. "Now if that person is an adult at the time that the story comes out, like with the Catholic Church, and they come forward and they want to talk, obviously they're an adult and they can make the decision for themselves." Once one adult has shared his or her story, more victims feel empowered to do the same. Participant 7 (male) said, "Let's use the Catholic Church for example. I'm sure the

Boston Globe did not want to report that story but there were multiple victims and by reporting about one victim, you find out about more victims.” Similar to the Domino Effect, abuse victims are more willing to share his or her story with the media after others have done so; however, the difference in these cases is that the victims have shared their stories after becoming adults. The news professionals also are sure to let adult victims understand what could happen after the public knows their stories and they are then online forever.

Social Media Effects

Another common theme among the news professionals interviewed was the role social media and the internet now play in protecting (or failing to protect) the identities of children. Often, if a story about an abused child is online or on a news station’s social media page, then the story will be available to the public. One news director expressed concern with having victim’s identities and stories available to everyone all the time. In this day and age with the internet, their name is going to last forever. Participant 4 (male) said, “Used to, before the internet, we were just concerned with what kind of reaction the community would have. It’s just not fair that [child victims] would be outed like that if it’s not their choice,” and, “I also try to keep in the back of my mind that all these stories are going to live forever on the internet.” So news professionals consider the risks associated with a story being accessible forever online.

There have been situations when someone related to a victim or suspect have asked the television news directors or newspaper editors halt publication or remove an existing story from the website. Participant 5 (female) said there have been cases where

parents have requested a story be taken off of the news station's website or social media; these situations usually involve a family member who was accused and arrested, then the rest of the family gets unwanted attention from their friends and acquaintances from the community. Participant 5 said, "When you put something on social media, it's there forever, it lives on. So those things have to be taken into account when you're doing anything involving a child because it can't be taken back." Although there are cases when a story is removed from a website, there are also times when a story has been aired on television, published in a newspaper, or been screenshot by a viewer or reader, making the story no longer in control by the media, but by the people who possess it. Another news professional (Participant 1, male) said because of the amount of people on social media, there is still a chance a child victim could be identified eventually, despite the media trying to protect his or her identity:

So, we could have a story that's posted to social media, and even though we've gone to great lengths to not identify somebody, a relative or sibling or someone you know on a thread may do that. That's widely available, and that's the only troubling part now is sometimes even if you've tried your best, you just sort of live with the fact that you've done what you can, or pull it down if you can.

Participant 1 pointed out that while news organizations may do their best to not identify someone, there is always potential for a child victim to be identified due to the wide use of social media.

Many newsrooms try to get their content out as quickly as possible, especially with breaking news because of social media. Child abuse stories are usually included in

breaking news, so news professionals have to get the stories out as quickly as possible. Participant 9 said the job of a news director is often teaching younger reporters to think about what they are wanting to report and what details they should include. “A big part of my job is to be a teacher, because [the reporters] live in a world of instant gratification... social media, Twitter. You find out about something, you tell everyone about it immediately. Well they’ve got to sit back and think and wait a minute.” Participant 9 is suggesting social media has caused young reporters to be more interested in sharing a story quickly, than taking time to consider the pros and cons of what they are wanting to share.

Children On Camera. Some of the news professionals interviewed said he or she may be willing to reveal a child victim’s identity if the parents and child want to share the child’s story, but others disagreed. The idea of letting children be on camera with the victim’s and parent’s approval is different than trying to “do no harm,” because it is a mutual agreement by all participants to help create awareness. Participant 3 (female) said that may not be in anyone’s best interest because of the repercussions that would later come with that decision:

So just because we can doesn’t mean we should. We actually have to have a conversation because in my opinion an eight-year-old boy on television talking about abuse delegations... just because we have that on camera doesn’t mean we should put it on TV because that would stay online forever. The mom might have had good intentions, but we don’t need them.

This news professional made it clear that even though the newsroom may work to inform a parent about the potential harm putting his or her child on camera, the newsroom may still say it is not needed. Participant 3 also said just because the mom may think it is in the child's best interest, the newsroom would disagree and say having the child on camera is not necessary. Despite some news professionals saying a child should not be on camera, even with a parent's approval, some said he or she would be willing to show a child on camera. One news director said if the parent wants their child to talk on camera, then he or she would be allowed to do so, if willing.

Participant 15 (male): If a parent comes to us and they want us to interview the child to talk about what happened to them so other child victims can come out and say, 'Look at what happened to this child.' He's talking about it because the [mother] said it's okay for him to talk about it. Just to say, 'You're not alone,' if that makes sense. If the child wants to, and if the parent says it's okay, you just have to be careful.

Participant 15 (male) went on to say the newsroom has to verify the story before allowing a child to be on camera. A parent would not be able to simply tell a news station that his or her child should talk about an abusive situation. The news professional said, "We have to vet that and do background search on it, make sure there's a police report, there's charges and indictment filed against the person with the accusations." As previously mentioned, legal documents still have to be obtained before every child abuse story.

Covering Child Abuse Ethically

Ethics is at the core of how journalists and news media make decisions, as well as at the core of this study. The news directors and newspaper editors were asked what ethical guidelines are used in their newsrooms, and what is ethical or unethical when covering child abuse. Participant 8 said ethics are a crucial part to the newsroom and company:

We have a very broad ethics policy that covers a variety of situations ranging from the treatment of victims and reporting to all kinds of things. Like the behavior of reporters in various situation, and just we have a wide range of ethical policies, and some of which are very specific and others which are trust people to make good decisions on ethical issues, so that would kind of be the short answer on our view of ethics. It's important. Ethics is important to us.

As mentioned above, many of the news professionals said their newsrooms have ethical guidelines about covering child abuse situations, but those guidelines are not always actually written down, as Participant 8 pointed out. Participant 1 (male) discussed that his newsroom acknowledges that not identifying a child abuse victim is an understood, universal rule, although it is not in his station's code of ethics. Most of the time in journalism, there are not a written set of guidelines explicitly stating what is or is not allowed to be said about an abused child. Journalists are expected to act ethically in dealing with child abuse cases and in other stories simply because they involve other people. Participant 1 (male) also implied that the greater good of the community and the news organization is, at times, more important than getting attention from an audience:

We wouldn't misrepresent ourselves to get a story. You know, you wouldn't do something like that. You wouldn't tell someone they're off the record and then print what they say. Those are the kind of ethics I think are standard just throughout journalism. But I don't know if we have written policies for news gathering... it's just something that's understood, and with younger reporters you sort of coach them.

As Participant 1 discussed, television news directors and newspaper editors will often let ethics override his or her desire to get attention on a story; this desire stems from social responsibility to the community in which the news professionals also live, a goal to do no harm or an intention to serve and protect the people depending on the news media to get information about their city and the world.

Although most news professionals agree it is unethical to identify a child abuse victim, it is important to note that they do not have to protect a victim's identity. One news director said the newsroom does not go out into the streets and interview children, but specified that it is not illegal to do so. Participant 15 (male) said, "Legally, we can, but ethically we don't go interview an eight or ten-year-old without a parent's permission. That's kind of the rule in the newsroom. If we don't have the parent's permission or even if they're 15 years old, we still don't identify them without the parental consent." Participant 15 also discussed that it is also not illegal to identify a child victim by saying the suspect had abused a family member. "Although legally, we can say that, we don't want to do that because that's going to identify the child." There are shield laws in place that say when it is acceptable for the media to get adults on camera, but for writing child abuse stories, news media can legally report the name, image or other

identifiers; however, as Participant 15 said, ethically, it is best to protect the child and keep the safety of the victim as the main priority.

One news professional said the idea of ethics is more about what is common decency. Participant 9 (male) said, “I think you want to give enough detail to paint the picture, but you don’t want to give enough detail to have a) your audience accuse you of crossing the line of decency and b) crossing the lines of decency.” This news director means that what the public deems as ethical or unethical is how a newsroom can help decide its ethical values. One of the concerns among television news directors and newspaper editors is that some news outlets might be reporting on child abuse stories to gain attention from viewers and readers. Participant 1 (male) said, “To me it becomes unethical when it’s done to sensationalize or salacious. That’s where the ethics part comes in. If the reporting is geared in a way just to get clicks or something. If you’re doing it for the wrong reasons, then it’s unethical.” It is important for the news media to be sure what they are reporting about child abuse is to serve and protect, rather than gain public attention to improve ratings. Participant 14 (male) had a similar conclusion, stating the ethical line is crossed whenever the intentions of sharing stories becomes only for publicity.

To me it’s if we frequently know the identity in these cases, through a variety of sources, but I think the ethical line is, ‘Are you throwing it out there? Are you putting the name out there just for the sake of getting attention and getting someone to watch a newscast or getting somebody to click on a web story?’ That certainly does not follow our guidelines as a reason to do that.

As mentioned above, news directors and editors do not legally have to protect the identity of a child; it is also significant to note that the news media often has access to the identity. The media usually has access to the age and name of a child abuse victim, and sometimes the media may also have an image or other identifiers about the victim. Participant 14 clarified that even though the newsroom may have access to the child's identity, it is unethical to use it, especially if it were used as a means of getting more viewers or readers.

Removing Stories. A rare occurrence in journalism is when a television news director or newspaper editor says he or she wants to remove a story from the website or retract a story entirely. Obviously, a story that has been published or aired cannot be taken back, but there have been cases when a story is requested to be taken down from a news station's website or social media page. Many news professionals said there have been times in his or her career when they have been asked to remove a story. News organizations are typically on a tight deadline, so there is often a race to see what news outlet can get a story to the public first; however, one news director said it may be wise to wait to share a story in order to not have to end up removing or retracting the story. Participant 9 (male) said, "I would love to be first with text alerts and web stories, but I want to be right before I want to be first. We want to be right and if we're wrong, we're the first to admit it and the first to correct it. There's a difference between being wrong and being unpopular." With so many stories about child abuse today, there are often occasions of when a child has lied about abuse. Participant 9 also said, "Now, [if a] parent was arrested for abuse, charges were dismissed, [we found out] the kid lied, I'm taking the story off. And that happens on a fairly regular basis." Though it is rare for a

television news director or news editor to take down a story from the website, Participant 9 explained that it is common for stories about child abuse to be taken down, even if the child's identity had not been revealed. Participant 6 shared an experience he had had where a child's parent had not given permission to use a story, even though the news reporter thought the parent had. Later, the news director found that the parents were not made aware of the news station using the child's story and the director had to deal with the repercussions. "It had already aired on the air so there wasn't much we could do as far as what was shown on television because it had already aired. But as far as the story being up digitally and on our homepage, I made sure it was taken down." The news director clarified that the child's parents had been supportive of the content of the story, but he went ahead and removed the story because the reporter had not gotten parental permission.

Removing stories from a website is not common in the news industry, but whenever there is a legitimate reason given by the people affected for why it should be retracted, most news organizations are willing to comply. This is an example of when the news media may not be legally bound to take action, but feel it is their ethical duty to do so and help the public in the best way it can.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The intention of this research was to better understand the decision-making process in newsrooms regarding coverage of child abuse. After analyzing the results of the research, five common themes arose: a) Do No Harm; b) Public Good; c) Age Affects Details; d) Social Media Effects; and e) Covering Child Abuse Ethically. Each of these five themes helped answer the research questions that were stated in the literature review.

The first research question of the study asked, “Is identifying a child victim ever justified?” Participants said although a story about child abuse or a missing child can be justified, identifying them intentionally is not. All 15 participants said their newsrooms’ goal is to ‘do no harm’ in any way to a child, reiterating that they do not believe identifying a child victim can be justified. Pavlik (2008) said it is most acceptable to identify a child abuse victim whenever he or she wants to share his or her story with the public. Previous research also said coverage of child abuse caused more harm to victims, and the news professionals interviewed agreed that the reason they do not identify victims is to keep them from reliving the trauma they have endured. Researchers aligned with the findings of this study, as many of the television news directors and newspaper editors interviewed said they would be willing to identify a child abuse victim if it were

his or her choice to do so (Jones, Finkelhor & Beckwith, 2010; Pavlik, 2008). Some researchers have said news coverage of child abuse could be beneficial to the public by making more people aware of it. News professionals said covering child abuse stories was for the “public good,” which solidify the findings in past research.

The second research question asked, “How do news directors decide when to identify a child victim?” The participants said, overwhelmingly, that first, if a child abuse victim has died from abuse, he or she would be identified. Another reason news professionals would identify a child is in a missing child case or if a parent and child wanted to talk about his or her story. Multiple researchers (Ayre, 2001; Ess, 2009; Maydell, 2018) have accused the news media of sensationalizing such stories, these news professionals said they try their best not to. The findings of this study supported the previous research. Although television news directors and newspaper editors said each story is a case by case basis as to what is reported. Participants said they believe it is unethical to cover child abuse stories only as a means of getting more public attention, and said there are only a few instances where they would be okay with identifying a child victim.

The third research question, “What ethical guidelines do television news directors or newspaper editors use when deciding whether to identify a victim?” addressed the guidelines each news professional abides by. As stated above, all television news directors and newspaper editors do not have written out rules about ethics, but all of the news professionals said they would not identify a child abuse victim because although there are no written rules, protecting the identity of child victims is in a sense, the “Golden Rule” of journalism (Participant 4, male). However, the participants of this

study had various opinions on what is ethical in how a child abuse story is written. Some news professionals said it is his or her ethical duty to provide information at the bottom of a news story on child abuse if people need help; this idea was supported by past researchers (Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995; Lonne & Parton, 2014) as well. Weatherred (2013) said the news media is a factor in creating awareness about child abuse, which was maintained by news professionals in the study. Television news directors and newspaper editors believe, ethically, they have to let the public know about what is going on in their community.

The findings of the study establish the presence of the agenda-setting function discussed in the literature review. Agenda-setting is the idea that the media influences what people think about, but not what they think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Participants of the study said the public is important to them, and said a lot of what they do is due to how the public reacts to various events. If the media places an importance on creating child abuse awareness, the public will begin to think about their community and helping children. Lonne and Parton (2014) discussed that the media can create awareness for child abuse by using their influence on the public. The goal of both parties is to decrease the amount of child abuse cases; by the media sharing with the community that child abuse is happening, the public will then be more willing to pay more attention to their surroundings, especially when children are involved, and take action if they see a child being harmed in any way.

The other theory used in the study is the hierarchical model of influences, which discussed five levels of influences on media content. According to Voakes (1997), journalists based their ethical opinions on considerations such as career advancement or

their religion. However, religion or career advancement were not mentioned by any of the news professionals interviewed. The five levels of influence as posited by Reese (2016) were: a) individual; b) routine practices; c) organizational; d) extramedia; and e) social systems. The model postulates each of the five levels affect what the media reports. Of the five levels of influence, extramedia and ideology were the two levels the news professionals discussed most in their interviews. References to extramedia by the television news directors and newspaper editors included comments about schools, whether making sure school teachers know how to recognize child abuse, or informing the public when school employees are involved in child abuse cases. Participant 15 (male) said his newsroom tries to give people, especially teachers, advice on how to help prevent child abuse: “[We] give teachers things to look out for if there’s a student who’s acting different or coming in with bruises.” The news professionals exemplified ideology in their interviews by discussing the influence the community has on what the media covers. Participant 15 (male) also said, “In the community when there’s crimes against children, and it’s a growing trend, we... get people the resources to go to if this is happening to [them].”

The researcher identified four takeaways from the research at hand. The first is the affect age plays in a child abuse story. The age of the victim may determine what how much information and detail is included in a story. The second finding is that news professionals hold their ethical principles as more valuable than getting public attention and increasing ratings. As mentioned in the introduction, two of the aspects outlined in the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics are “minimize harm” and “be accountable and transparent” (“Code of Ethics,” 2014. para. 1); these two features were

mentioned by the participants in this study, and are an example of how television news directors and newspaper editors consider ethics more important than getting a story published or aired. Legally, news professionals can share whatever information is given on the legal documents they have access to, but instead, they choose to act ethically and protect the children who have been abused, as well as adults who have been sexually abused. The study is also important to television news directors, newspaper editors, media outlets and journalists because it shares their opinions on the ethics of covering child abuse. The opinions of news professionals are rarely revealed to the public, and this study is an example of the media sharing a “behind-the-scenes” look into the decision-making process of television news directors and newspaper editors. Third, the study’s findings are significant because the specific research has not been conducted in the past. This research is important because it has provided an in-depth look into how television news directors make decisions about child abuse stories and gave more knowledge about agenda-setting and the hierarchical model of influences. Finally, this research is important because it benefits both the public and the news media. The study informs the public that the news media make many of their decisions with the intent of informing and protecting their community; the study also lets the public know decisions are made only after discussions about how each story should be written.

Limitations

Limitations in the study at hand are about the people involved in the study. The research could have benefitted from having more participants, because a larger pool would provide more findings and bring more experience into the study. In this study, only three women were interviewed out of 15. If half or almost half of the participants were

women, the study would be more diverse and provide better insight into the decision-making process of news professionals. Women who are television news directors and newspaper editors are often parents, which may influence how questions about child abuse coverage are answered. Another obvious limitation of the study at hand is the smaller proximity of the participants. Participant 9 discussed his experience with Los Angeles and Las Vegas, both of which were described as being more willing to share the gory details of child abuse cases. Interviewing news professionals in cities such as Chicago, New York, etc., as well as East and West U.S. would provide a difference in views and ethics in regard to child abuse discussions.

Future Research

Many other research projects could emerge from the research at hand. For instance, researchers could use the theories presented to interview people who frequently see or watch news accounts of child abuse cases, then compare and contrast the opinions of news professionals and those of the public. Future research could also focus on each of the major themes specified in the findings section. Ethics is a broad subject, and future research could study various aspects of the ethical decisions in news, such as covering politics or hate crimes. Researchers could also study how social media has affected the decisions news professionals make on a day to day basis. Studies could be done to include suggestions on how to decrease child abuse cases by getting opinions from news professionals. A study interviewing adults who have shared his or her story with the media may be beneficial to further research about child abuse and news coverage; this type of study could analyze the how the former victims perceive news coverage of child abuse. Another suggestion for future research is to conduct a similar study, but examine

agenda-setting and framing, which was suggested by Popovic (2018). Examining framing as a second theory to similar research would allow researchers to look at how the news media writes stories specifically targeted to gaining public attention, which is the idea of framing. A final suggestion for future research is to conduct qualitative research; using interviews or focus groups, especially in the media field, help gain understanding of how news professionals make decisions and why certain decisions are made. Discovering the meaning and reasons for why the media reports specific things the way it does allows researchers and the public to gain more knowledge of the news media industry.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Protocol (Prompts are in parentheses)

1. What ethical guidelines does your newsroom abide by?
2. How can a news director's or editor's personal ethical beliefs override a reporter's or the audience's ethical values?
3. What factors go into the decision of what to publish about an abused child?
4. What steps have to be taken before identifying a child abuse victim?
5. How can a child abuse story be justified?
6. What type of stories are you more likely to identify a child in?
7. What specifics would a child abuse story need to have for you to publish something that might lead to revealing the child's identity?
8. What are the benefits and concerns that come with choosing to identify a child victim?
9. Where do you draw the line of what is deemed unethical when choosing to identify a victim of child abuse?
10. Additional question: How does the age of the victim determine how you write a child abuse story?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Title of Study _____ Researcher _____

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to gain knowledge about how decisions are made in newsrooms regarding coverage of child abuse. The researcher hopes this will give wisdom to news directors and editors in trying to decide what precautions to take in protecting or identifying an abused child.

Procedures

This research will be conducted in 20 in-depth interviews. The interviewees will be television news directors and newspaper editors from Oklahoma and North Texas. The interviews will be conducted privately, with only the researcher and participant to hear the discussion. All audio from the interviews will be recorded by an iPhone. The recordings, notes and transcripts will only be listened to by the researcher. The names and station names of the interviewees will not be used in the final transcript of this study.

Risks

There are few risks in being involved in this research study. If an interviewee was abused while he or she was a child, or if an interviewee has dealt with serious cases of

child abuse in the news field, he or she may feel emotionally stressed or grieved.

Benefits and Compensation

There is no promise of benefits, and there is no compensation for participating in this study. The researcher hopes the field of mass communications may find some benefits in having this study available.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The only identifying information used in the final transcript of this study is the number of years the interviewee has been working at his or her station, the number of years he or she has been in the news field, and whether or not he or she is working in television or newspaper.

Freedom to Withdraw

If a participant finds it necessary to withdraw from this study, he or she will be allowed to do so at any point between the time of the interview until completion of the study. Should a participant wish to be removed from the study, he or she should call the following number:

Lauren Waugh - 580.770.1525

Approval of Research

As required, this qualitative study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University.

IRB Approval Date _____

Approval Expiration Date _____

Researcher _____

Participant _____

VITA

Lauren A. Waugh

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE: NEWS COVERAGE OF CHILD ABUSE

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Journalism at Oklahoma Christian University, Oklahoma City, OK in 2017.

Experience:

Graduate Teacher's Assistant at Oklahoma State University. Social media and videography intern at University Center at OkState. Producer and reporter for Eagle Media at Oklahoma Christian University. News intern at KSWO-TV.