**Title: Keeping Your Conscience Without Losing Your Head: The Pressures of a Multimedia Journalist in a Television News Production Environment**

**Abstract:**

The conventions of the television news story remain the same whether or not the method is completed in the traditional manner or as a multimedia journalist or MMJ. Each member of a tradition TV news crew, the reporter, the videographer and the editor take on set of conscience decisions based on their tasks. A multimedia journalist is one person with more of a workload making technical and ethical conscience decisions that were once unseen, unrealized until the technicians disappeared from the process. This study examines what conscience decisions are made when workloads increase and when new skills are learned. How does a multimedia journalist develop a journalistic ethic, a conscience, and new skills to adapt to a convergent paradigm?

**Introduction:**

Multimedia journalists are often pressured to perform quickly and under deadline. Under the pressures, the MMJ may take shortcuts when videotaping stories. The shortcuts could lead to ethical or journalistic considerations. Because the MMJ “videotapes” and is not considered a “photojournalist” the videography is allowed to be less succinct to the subject, many times becoming “wall paper” for a written script. However, the videotaping of the story is where there is the most pressure for the multimedia journalist. The act of videotaping by a multimedia journalist becomes mechanical and less of an art of storytelling as the rules of photojournalism do not seem to be applied. Staging and other acts of questionable actions become part of the desire to be more efficient.

Technical skills are a necessity for the TV MMJ especially in terms of the video camera and non-linear editing. The quality of the MMJ is based on the efficiency of the MMJ to shoot, report and edit stories. They are judged by whether they complete the story under deadline and the accuracy of the story.

The approach to multimedia journalism seems to indicate videotaping is an appendage of the journalistic process. Prior to the advent of the modern model of the MMJ, videotaping an event was a journalistic oversight, as if the process was a technical construction, not a journalistic one. For a variety of reasons the main cause of stress for MMJs is the operation of the video camera. There are numerous requirements needed to operate the camera whilst in the process of communicating with another person with the intention of extracting information. It often leads to technical mistakes and journalistic mistakes. The task of reporter becomes an exercise. Storytelling becomes a structured puzzle for which the MMJ attempts to fit pieces into. Imagery is unimaginative, wide shots, and no natural sound.

Reporters who transform into the MMJ go through stages of accepting the interaction with technology. At first, the relationship is combative, as the equipment becomes a barrier to reporting skills. The recording of interviews and events is purely a technical act of gathering needed material. Most reporters feel uneasy about the process, and the camera is viewed as a detriment, a handicap to their reporting skills. The MMJ either accepts the paradigm or attempts to reject it using various methods. The struggling reporter becomes distracted as production methods are learned and their conscience is suppressed. Frequently, the MMJ takes the path of least resistance in order to increase efficiency. The goal is making a deadline.

MMJs are frustrated with the processes they are expected to perform. Deadlines, expectations and workloads have increased expeditiously as corporate measures eliminate staff and increase newscasts. Increased deadlines and decreased production time are looming instigators of compromise. The business model creates a workforce of less experienced journalists who are labored with additional technical jobs of videography and editing. The expectations for the MMJs are more about productivity, efficiency and timeliness, not as much being journalistically sound or creative storytellers.

A still photographer is conspicuous while the MMJ is attached to the camera with the interview subject usually wearing a microphone making natural behavior optimistic at best. Only the technically astute MMJ can conscientiously maneuver both the visual aspects of a story and keep the interview subject comfortable and at ease. Sometimes, MMJ often becomes “lost” in the viewfinder and views the interview subject as an object, a piece of the mechanics of building a news story and sometimes the MMJ forgets about the video and audio and becomes lost in the interview. There is little time for the MMJ to quickly create a rapport with the interview subject when equipment must be set up, microphones attached, and questions need to be asked.

The MMJ may feel it is easier to tell the subject what to do in order to record the essential b-roll needed to complete a story. Deborah Potter (2004) warned viewers of the manipulation of video that was occurring in local newsrooms and even at network news levels (Potter, 2004: 60). There is an expectation that what is shown on newscasts really happened. The Radio-Television News Directors Association code of ethics states: “Professional journalists should not present images or sounds that are reenacted without informing the public.” At the MMJ level at the local affiliate reenactment may be a casual request of an interview subject to walk a certain direction, pick up something in their hand or stare out a window. The pressure of efficiency replaces photojournalism with photo creating. Some MMJs do it without thinking, as it is the method they learned and no one challenges their conscience as to what is ethically correct.

The challenge for the MMJ is to act like a photojournalist, not a cameraperson. If the videographer is to form a conscience, the videographer must take their eye out of the viewfinder. The act of journalism is predicated by the act of observation, not collection of data. In this sense, the MMJ is an ethnographer with the ability to collect raw samples of human behavior or thoughts. In the three roles of an MMJ, the videographer is a photojournalist attempting to capture a moment that accurately expresses the event. As a video editor, the MMJ sequences shots to tell a story in an artful way. As a reporter, the MMJ must oversee the process as to not misrepresent the data and challenge any ethical dilemmas caused by the performance of videography and editing. To improve the status of the MMJ, photojournalism codes appear to be needed.

**Methodology:**

*‘The fragmentation of labor in the factory made it possible to break down work into simple operations which gradually came to require new and specialized tools, and those tools were finally combined to form a machine-tool which rapidly displaced the worker to the periphery of productive labor.’ – Doray, B. (1988: 4)*

The purpose of the ethnographic study is to compare and contrast the newsgathering between the traditional and converged journalists. The ethnographic study creates qualitative data identifying paradigms within the news crews. The paradigms will be examined for variations between the traditional and converged journalists.

My approach is a mixed method approach (Creswell and Piano-Clark, 2007), combining quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate changes to the production methods of local television news gatherers (Deacon et al, 1999, Emerson et al., 1995, Hansen et al., 1998). It was my intention to be a reflective practitioner (Machin & Niblock, 2006: 25); in such a way, I can step back and contemplate the events presented before me and contemplate the wider forces at work around me.

Working groups of both the converged and traditional models create a similar product, yet the impact of the change in the production model can be seen as a threat to the product as well as the industry (McChesney et al., 2005: 310-355). This thesis studies the working groups of local television news in the attempt to analyze the impact on the product caused by technological and structural changes.

My comparison of the working groups is based on various criteria established during the formative phases of this study. In the production of news or the production of any manufactured product, time management is extremely important (Schlesinger, 1978:79), (Schudson, 2003: 134). Deadlines in news production are viewed as one of the most important criteria and it is vital that each working group completes the task within the same period of time. External (Monks, 1987: 20-21) and internal influences can affect both the work group and the product itself (Kreitner et al., 2010: 538). Habitual behavior seems to be a by-product of various criteria and inter-relationships from internal and external influences (Kreitner et al., 309); most notably to improve coordination between groups. To improve efficiency and output, ritual behavior seems to be developed. What forms of habitual behavior are found in both the traditional and converged working groups? Completing the tasks in order to create the expected product can be viewed in several ways: capacity and increased output (Monks, 1987: 72) or quality assurance (Gordon, 1987: 640). What are the varying perspectives of each working group as to their ideal of the successful completion of their tasks? Are those expectations the same as those of their supervisors or other management? By what criteria do the work groups or management judge success?

This research was carried out using multiple integrated methods of analysis to examine and compare the textual and environmental factors, of television news construction by local television journalists. The various methods were used in order to obtain a reliable collection of data that could be replicated in similar circumstances. The goal of the methodology was to triangulate the findings in order to have the most accurate record of the events (Hansen et al, 1998: 44).

An ethnographic study was conducted in two news organizations and included thirty-seven interviews with managers, television reporters, videographers and tape editors. The qualitative interviews helped to confirm or redefine my observations. Textual analysis between the various subject groups was used to compare the news stories that were created. A quantitative study examined television news stories from various periods of construction, from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s to the present day. The goal of the textual analysis was to determine changes in construction over a forty-year span.

Ethnographic study observed the control group (traditional news crew) and the variable group (the converged news crew). While other forms of methodology such as questionnaires or surveys look for one-way communications, the ethnographic interview is multi-dimensional. The researcher can be examined as well as the research subjects (Bourdieu, 1996; 18). This study compares the similar tasks of the two observed groups. The ethnographic study within both environments compares how the tasks are completed between the two groups. I challenged the ethnographic findings by using qualitative interviews. I tried not to become a direct participant in the activities so that I would not influence the environment and the relationships between the tasks and the crewmembers. I was aware of my own prejudices and guarded my interactions with the members of the observed news organizations. In order to prevent my own transfer or projection of my own ideologies, I conducted qualitative interviews with substantive questions to better understand their perspective and marginalize my own views.

Their response may not be taken as an absolute. The subject may not be in a position to study his or her own behavior (Deacon et al, 1999: 254). The interviews helped me to identify attitudes and the impact of both the external and internal environments. [[1]](#footnote-1)

I conducted this methodology as a practitioner-researcher utilizing participant observation. This approach is demanding (Hansen et al., 1998: 36) and I was fortunate to have access to my subject for an extended period of time, from 2006 to the present day. Officially, the field study was completed prior to 2011. In addition, my experience in the local television news industry gave me access and contacts to various television news organizations in the United States. Access is considered the most challenging element for the ethnographer researcher (Schlesinger, 1980). Fortunately for my study, I had unlimited access to the main organization under study: WKYC-TV in Cleveland, Ohio. This provided opportunities but I had to be aware of my personal routines and assumptions. In order for any ethnographer to be successful, the ethnographers must be able to perceive themselves as part of the environment and prevent themselves from affecting or becoming a part of the culture under study (Deacon et al. 1999: 258). Schlesinger (1980) believes anthropological and sociological traditions must be integrated into ethnographic methodologies in order to better understand the minds, cultures and practices of media producers (Schlesinger, 1980: xxxi-xxxii). I attempted to incorporate various disciplines while creating this methodology.

Participant observation seemed the strongest approach for analysing the differences in the production methods of the two types of news producing units.

Hansen et al. (1998) listed six strengths of participant observation: it records and makes the invisible visible; it counters the ‘problem of inference’; it improves upon other methods by triangulation; it qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims; it reminds us of the contingent nature of cultural production; it provides evidence for the dynamic as well as the embedded nature of cultural production.

While the position of practitioner-researcher makes it difficult to ensure detachment from the subjects, misinterpretation or misreading of material during the ethnographic study is less likely (Deacon, 1999: 256). Interpretation of procedures and jargon can be more difficult for a researcher who has no prior experience. The interpretation of the practitioner’s behaviors can lead to assumptions that may or may not be relevant to the study.

Domingo (Patterson & Domingo, 2008: 5) outlined the benefits and weaknesses of ethnographic methodologies. They can provide a huge amount of very rich firsthand data as researchers can directly witness actions, routines, and definitions of technology and social relations. They can obtain an insider’s view. Researchers can watch the evolution of a behavior caused by the introduction of a stimulus and interpret it, which is important to the study.

Ethnography is a practice developed by anthropologists. It requires researchers to immerse themselves into the culture being studied, getting to know the people intimately and recording their actions in a natural setting (Deacon et al, 1999: 6).

Domingo (Patterson & Domingo, 2008: 5) understood the weakness of ethnographic methodologies to be similar to those highlighted by Schlesinger (1980). The ethnographic methodology was found to be time consuming and the actors were often disturbed by the presence of the researcher. In some instances in my study, especially with management, there seemed to be a greater awareness of my presence. The responses may not have been genuine as they attempted to gauge my intentions.

Some of the subjects and actors in this study may not want me to quote them and in most instances they wished to remain anonymous. Results should not be generalized but seen in the context of specific cases and circumstances. My pilot study in 2006 helped create the appropriate research model for subsequent studies. The study revealed trends and behaviors of the intended subject group adapting to influences. The further study attempted to see if the trends continued.

In the process of the pilot study and subsequent participation, I believe I was able effectively to take a scientific view and witness the construction of a news story without my own personal beliefs interfering with the interpretation. I base this on the answers to the interviews as well as from a collective of similar observations.

It is typical of ethnographic study to involve an in-depth investigation of a small number of cases, even a single case, rather than trying to represent general trends (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). In this case, I focused on a few organizations, but examined and witnessed numerous news constructions within those organizations.

The following questions were established and examined under the pretense of the methodology.

Questions:

H1: Has the removal of crafts individuals revealed their contribution to newsgathering?

H2: Is the act of videotaping and editing impacting the reporting of news?

H3: Are there unseen residual effects caused by the use of multimedia journalists in television news?

H4: Can a conscience of an MMJ be found in the “authorship or ownership” of a story?

**The MMJ: Innovative Production/Business Model**

The argument is said that the audience is changing rapidly and the media has to change with it. ‘Media convergence has nothing to do with technology or architecture. It has everything to do with mindset’ (Quinn, 2004: 119). The introduction of the Internet and other media, into an existing newsroom, stimulates the acceptance of new requirements. The consumers wanting news 24-hours poise the requirements, seven days a week, online and available when they want. New positions are created to allow for flexibility and expanded coverage necessary to remain competitive with the new demands (Quinn, 2004: 119).

Unique to this study is the examination of the crafts individuals who perform the tasks of acquiring audio and video for television news stories. This study questions the assumptions made about television journalism and the lack of research on crafts individuals. This study does not assume imagery is random and inconsequential while performing journalism. This study will look directly upon the removal of technically skilled employees from the traditional television news crew and attempt to measure the significance. With convergence of media, the reporter is asked to take on roles once deemed benign to the journalist.

News is traditionally produced by a team of actors, each with a core craft or skills to contribute to the final product, and is now replaced by the notion of the single-authored news production (Hemmingway, 2008: 79). Hemmingway (2008) defined the traditional crew as a journalist, a camera operator and a VT editor. The journalist is assumed to be the reporter. But this stance seems semi-hypocritical: prior to single-authorship, were any of the crafts individual’s parts of the authorship? They must have made some contribution to the journalism. It may be argued the contribution of crafts individuals is significant in acts of factual representation of events and they may be responsible for maintaining credibility, which is a concern of the single news production unit and multi-skilled journalists (Quinn, 2004), (Deuze, 2005), (Oyedji, 2010). Both the videographer and the editor frame the factual information with representative media. It is their responsibility to construct meaning that relates to the facts, represent them fairly and convey a visual connotation to the words spoken (Medoff et al, 2007: 295).

The omission of the crafts individuals from the discussion of acts of journalism may reflect a general consensus that they are not journalists. Research at a theoretical level views journalism as a process within a culture of reporters and management (Schlesinger, 1978), (Turow, 1983), (Ursell, 2001), (Schudson, 2003). Crafts individuals are viewed as part of the larger organizational culture, but not as direct catalysts of the processes. They appear to be appendages to the body of production. From the practitioner stance, the crafts individuals influence the product but do not necessarily impact the intellectual properties of journalism (Tirohl, 2000), (Underwood, R., 2007), (Hemmingway, 2008). Research appears to categorize crafts individuals as cultural units with little power to make decisions. The crafts individuals are part of the ideology of a news organization, yet have little influence upon it. Some research suggests news production is influenced by a dominant ideology (Tuchman, 1978), in which news is seen as the social production of ‘reality’ and consequently does not actually reflect reality but is determined by those who hold power in society (Harrison, 2006: 32). The crafts individuals are not mentioned as ‘creators’ of reality, but as part of a larger collective ideology.

It may be the crafts individual has a role in the social order and therefore influences the practices. The social organization of news production seeks to understand the actual practices involved in producing news (ibid: 31). It may be concluded the job of the news organization is to deliver, within the constraints of time and space, the most acceptable news product to its audience in the most efficient manner (ibid: 141). The production of news needs to be carried out efficiently and impartially. Even when the research study details the practice of news production, the crafts individuals are not labeled journalists.

**Authorship and Conscience Actions**

Theoretically, the multimedia journalist has no other person to transfer ownership of the story. The MMJ creates all facets and may be considered the “author” of the work. The idea of ‘authorship’ is elusive in the construction process (Underwood, 2007: 131-143). ‘The authorship or ownership of production is lost in the transmitted product, and the multiplicity of meaning and interpretations is handed to the viewer (Hemmingway, 2004: 418).’ Authorship contains a set of assumptions, beliefs and values. Without the contextualization of those entities, no story can be told (McNair, 1998: 5-6).

While authorship may appear to be lost in transmission it seems very important to researchers to know who is the journalist constructing the story. Pavlik (2001) expresses the concerns over the individual who is disseminating information. Is the journalist identified (Pavlik, 2001, 63)? To Pavlik and others (Anderson, 2004:127-131), (McNair, 1998: 6), the values and beliefs of journalists are important because it seems journalists can not construct their narratives without a barometer of ideals which may be latently or purposely projected. While they may believe the ideas of fairness, integrity and accuracy are the goals of journalism, they fear journalists can hide behind the ‘cloak of objectivity, fairness and accuracy’ without addressing the fundamental issue of whether what she or he has reported is actually true. The story may be impartial but it does not make it true (Pavlik, 2001: 93). If it is important to know who is the author of ‘news’ than shouldn’t we want to know who is constructing the visual text? If a reporter constructs a false sentence would the same judgment fall if creating false visual representations?

Significantly, the process of producing news quickly over multiple platforms has allowed external organizations more access to newsrooms. This study observed a significant use of solicited stories from business and government offices. Businesses are using press releases to entice news organizations to cover stories created by public relations departments (Stryker, 2002: 519-530), (Schwartz et al., 2002: 2859-2863), (Bushee et al., 2010: 1-19).

The roles of the television journalist seem to be rapidly changing as the profession of television journalist appears to being redefined by the tasks of the multi-media journalist (Aviles et al, 2008: 229-230). It appears technology is causing the roles to change, yet that may be presumptuous as management of news organizations apparently change the models of production (Kolodzy, 2006: 10). Technology itself does not seem to change the methods of production. The act of performing television journalism appears to be unchanged; the mode of performing it seems to be altered. There is a synergy of multiple forces between the workers and management causing the rifts in the design of the methods of news production (Quinn, 2005: 29-38).

**On the Mean Streets: Reporting with a Camera in Hand and an Eye on the Clock**

*‘It’ll be the slam, bam, get it done people because that’s exactly what you’re expected to do. The in-depth reporting, the having the luxury of investigative reporting, developing a story, spending time is another issue. There are stories that you just can’t do in an hour, or in 2 hours, or 3 hours, and that’s where we’re you, you know? You gotta bang this stuff out, and you gotta bang it out quick. It doesn’t work.’*

* Senior Photographer, WSTM-TV, Syracuse, New York.

When on location at a news story, the traditional crew will perform separate tasks. They do so, believing it increases their speed of newsgathering. In the case of spot news, this may be true. In general news stories, there seemed to be little disparity in the length of time at a location, interviewing a subject and acquiring the raw material for the news package.

According to the traditional crews, the aesthetic value of the imagery suffers when the single news production unit videotapes interviews. To the videographer, the difference in the two crews revolves around the lighting of the interviews. The videographer will attempt to use lights to enhance the quality of the videotape. They are an extra piece of equipment and many traditional and single news production units do not like carrying them. For a multimedia journalist, the amount of equipment to take into an office building or location becomes a determining factor on how an interview is conducted. If no artificial lights are possible, depending on the situation, a videographer will determine a location that best utilizes light and background. The observed multimedia journalists were very hesitant to use artificial lights. Using overhead fluorescent lights, desk lamps or light from a nearby window was the preferred method to conduct an interview. The cameras were able to produce a relatively good picture despite the lack of lights. The 1970s video shows deep, dark, contrasting video. Despite using lights, the aesthetic quality of the video is affected by the technology. In regards to the advancement of technology and the impact on journalism, the newer cameras’ ability to be used in natural light, compared to the 1970s and 1980s, is significantly better. It makes interviews possible, which would not have been achievable in the past. The MMJ in the earlier decades, labeled “one man bands” would struggle with efficiency under today’s standards, based on the amount of equipment needed to perform a single interview.

The multimedia journalist seems to approach a subject differently from the traditional crew. Efficiency is as important as accuracy and content that cannot be obtained in an efficient manner is consequently ignored. From the interviews with news directors and multimedia journalists, it was clear that it was more important to have a story completed on time than the story being complex, thoroughly resourced, or visually stunning. Meeting deadlines was the essential gauge of success for both the MMJs and the management. Driving to a location to get a second source or a third was not efficient and instead of a videotaped interview, the source would be contacted by phone to gather the information. Methods of field production for the MMJ were dependent upon the time allowed for videotaping, their physical capacity to carry equipment, and the ability of the reporter to operate the equipment. Carrying and using additional stand lights was not considered important in the videotaping of interviews, as it would be for a traditional crew. The physicality of the labor increases, with the MMJ, as equipment needs to be moved in and out of locations. Producing a news story without additional support from crafts individuals puts a burden on the single news production unit to maintain a flow of production. The MMJ approaches the public and the subject of a news story differently from the traditional news crew. Depending on the situation, the MMJ meets the subject with a camera in hand, for security and expediency reasons. The traditionalists can approach a subject without a camera and casually ask the subject to appear on camera, and then bring the camera operator into the situation. The MMJ cannot do this; if MMJ leaves a camera in the car, it seems to complicate the tentative relationship between a subject and the reporter. The moment of gathering essential information or capturing a sensitive sound bite can be jeopardized.

*“Think about a print reporter. Think about the scary situations of going up to door as a woman. One time, I went to the door of a murderer by myself. The photographer was in the car. The guy had kids in the background. His wife was ‘missing’ and here I was knocking on the door by myself. When you go to the inner city, it is always rough…I’ve been shot at. A one man band is more of a handicap.”*

*– Carole Chandler, Reporter, WKYC-TV*

It was observed how deadlines affect the production method and the division of labor. The production schedules were intensified for the multimedia journalist, as they were unable to take breaks while elements were being produced. The traditional crewmembers have ‘down time’. Reporters are able to sit and contemplate while riding from the newsroom to the story and back. The single news production units are unable to stop their momentum for fear of not making deadlines.

*‘When you start looking at the one-man, the concept of the one-man band, just looking at how it’s more efficient because these (traditional) crews waste time, but other issues come up when it’s used. We aren’t really serving the community like I think local news should be.’*

*- MMJ, WSTM-TV.*

In a traditional crew, the reporter would take the information, call the sources and set up an interview. The videographer and the reporter would then drive to the location. In transit, the reporter would often be making additional calls in regards to the story. The videographer is given the responsibility of driving to the news story locations. In all the traditional crews studied, the photographer was the driver of the news vehicle. The intention was to allow the reporter to make phone calls and/or write notes. In some instances, the reporter would look at videotape by playing it back via the camera while returning back to the station.

*“I was able to edit all the sound, write up the story, phone it in ahead of time, have somebody here take my dictation for the story so it was put into the rundown. When I got here, I was immediately…able to track the stories, they were edited, put on the air in time and we were able to pull it off. That’s how a team operates. I don’t think multimedia journalists or whatever you want to call them pull off something quite like that.”*

*- Jim Kenyon, traditional TV reporter, WSTM-TV, Syracuse, New York*

**MMJ and Video Editing: Where the Conscience Lies**

*‘The photographer tells the story, the reporter is sort of the conduit, and the editor makes the story. It can be poorly shot out in the field, I can write it better than it is shot and the editor can either sink it or make it sing in the edit bay.’*

*- Reporter – WKYC-TV (Cleveland, Ohio)*

In a traditional crew, the video editor has a hidden layer of editorial control, as he or she is the last person to decide the look and content of the news story. There are many individuals who are invisible in the process of constructing a news story, and, in this particular study, the video editor is perhaps the least visible. Hemmingway believes, ‘It is the very invisibility of the network to specific actors at specific times that is fundamental to the overall success of the production process (Hemmingway, 2008; 35).’

*‘Basically it is up to me. I can do whatever I want with the piece. Rarely do they (reporters), tell me what they want. Pretty much I look through the video find what matches, what I am hearing. It’s up to me pretty much as far as pacing. And what video I lay down. It is really up to me. They rarely say, ‘I want it to be’. I probably cut 15 packages a week. And I mean, maybe once every two or three weeks a reporter might say, I want to do this with the piece.’*

*– Video Editor, WKYC-TV*

The video editor seems to affect the story’s content. Unlike a reporter, who is scrutinized for maintaining the balance of a story, to not show bias or invoke an emotion, the editor is insulated from such criticism. In some cases, the video editor will manipulate the sequence of imagery in order to present what the editor believes to be a ‘better’ story for dramatic appeal. In the opinion of the video editors in the study and of Machin and Niblock (2006), ‘News must be dressed up so that it conveys a relevance to particular groups (Machin and Niblock, 2006: 21). And while the news industry continues to be criticized for bias, distortion, inaccuracy and lack of context, it may appear as if the editors have a hand in the results (2006: 23).

One particular video editor at WKYC-TV openly admitted to manipulating video:

*‘One piece that stands out, that I remember doing there was a rapist that was being sentence to prison time, and the first part of the (raw tape) the first fifteen minutes or so, he was sitting there, and he was all smug, smiling and looking around, but then when they started sentencing the guy, he started crying, you know his face was all red, he looked upset. He looked scared because he knew he was going to prison for a long time, so, as an editor, out of respect for the victims, when I showed that guy I showed more of the shots of him looking scared than the shots of him looking all happy and smiling. So, I didn’t want the people at home, and (laughs)…whether it being ethical or not, hey, I didn’t want this guy to look like it was no big deal…I wanted the people at home to say at the end of the piece, ‘Good, you got what you deserved.’ And I wanted them to say, ‘Good, look at him, he’s scared.’ So, I wanted the guy to look bad. So, I showed him looking bad. And I even, I remember thinking about it when I was doing it, so it was definitely deliberate that I showed his, every time I showed him, it was in that light. You know, you had to stay in chronological order too, I mean, you can’t bounce back and forth, it would look silly to show him one minute with tears coming down his face and then cut away to the judge and come back to him and there is no tears and his face isn’t red and he’s smiling and laughing. So, you have to keep continuity there so I chose that continuity of that whole package, maybe him walking in, maybe we started with him walking in but from that point on, the rest of the piece that guy was upset. He was crying, he was scared, he was nervous for the rest of that piece. So I mean, I definitely did…”*

*– Video Editor, WKYC-TV.*

Management did not condone this behavior but it did not seem to have any repercussions on the tape editor. The manipulation was unseen; except for the videographer and the reporter, no one else would understand the juxtaposition. The agenda setting and framing of visuals (Scheufele et al., 2006) may be the work of the video editor and not the reporter or management. The unseen force of the tape editor may direct personal bias into the story without the knowledge of those who claim authorship. As far as the technical crafts are concerned, management does not directly criticize stories for their editing. However, if some of the visuals used in the story involve commercial clients of the television station, management intercedes to prevent the client being directly implicated.

*“Seeing several stories not run because an advertiser might be offended, or offended by the fact that we showed up there because he was involved in something lotharios. We’ve given our away our ethics. ” – Dave Hollis, Videographer, WJW-TV, Cleveland, Ohio.*

It seems the relationship between the management’s editorial decisions and the distance between idea development and final editing weakens the role of the video editor. The video editor’s supervisor is the operations manager, yet the operations manager does not have any contact with the news story. The news director controls the story selection from the beginning of the morning meeting and until the script is approved but the final edit is left in the hands of the individual video editor. There is little or no interaction between the video editor and the news director.

*‘I can change the way it looks a little bit, but as far as the message of the story, it is already pre-conceived before it comes into this room (edit room). We really don’t have the time to change It.’ – Video Editor, WKYC-TV.*

It is very rare that the news director confronts the video editor about manipulating the images of the story. The news director may not know what video, or what alternatives exist. The process of construction would be severely hampered if the management took a vested interest in the editing of each story. Logistics management may appear as a rationalization (Rogers et al., 2002: 10). It would be a form of ‘avoidance’ if the news story failed to air. The loss of the package to a newscast could jeopardize the newscast.

The substantial difference between the multimedia journalist and the traditional videographer seems to be the amount of attention given to craft skills. Yet there are some benefits in eliminating the video editor. The removal of the tape editor may in fact bring more accuracy to a story, as he may not have all the factual information or understand the dynamics of the event because he was not on the scene or involved in the interviews.

*“Sometimes we don’t have enough time to gather the facts that we need and aren’t able to present the best product that we can because we don’t really know enough about it, because we weren’t there.” – TK, Video Editor, WKYC-TV.*

*“They get 30 minutes to slam it together so I don’t think a whole lot of thought goes into it.”- AR, Video Editor, WKYC-TV.*

*“Sometimes the reporter will come back and say, ‘I trust you’ve looked at all of my tapes?’ And I’ll say, I just found out I’m doing your story, ‘What is your story called?*

*I don’t even know what you are doing.’ All of a sudden they drop it in your lap and you’ve got thirty five minutes to put it together and you don’t even know what it is called.”*

*- CM, Video Editor, WKYC-TV.*

**Conclusions:**

***H1: Has the removal of crafts individuals revealed their contribution to newsgathering?***

*‘The backpacks are eliminating a photographer and an editor and there are so many people who want to do this job, you will want to find enough people that want to be a backpack journalist that don’t know what they are doing and they are going to get on the job training. It comes down to strictly money. It is as simple as that. You cut two positions out and I don’t think you raise the quality that much.’*

*- Reporter-WKYC-TV, (Cleveland, Ohio).*

The crafts individuals seem to affect the quality of the product, as seen by their removal. Traditionalists contest the quality of the product produced by the multimedia journalist and look to their peers for their validation. (Wallace, 2009: 699). Yet, as seen by this study, there are hidden agendas and lack of appreciation for the collaboration of crafts individuals. Management seems to be more open to the audience’s expectations of the quality of professional output (ibid: 699). There seems to be a ‘constant negotiation’ between journalists, crafts individuals and managers over the concept and application of ‘quality.’

More often the conversation about the transformation to the converged journalists involves a common thread. Technology is enabling the transformation (Kolodzy, 2006), (Hemmingway, 2008) (Quinn, 2004: 110). When asked why the transformation is occurring, there are common responses. The equipment is smaller. The equipment is easier to use. The equipment is lighter. The single news production unit is assuming the roles of the videographer but some of the tasks are not transferring. Lighting equipment is largely unused by most multimedia journalists. Traditional crews frequently complain they are unable to use lighting equipment because of the perceived lack of time to set up the equipment. If management demanded the equipment, the perception of necessity may be altered (Killebrew, 2005, 96-97). It leads one to understand if the traditional crews believe they do not have enough time, than it seems rational the single news production unit has even less time. None of the observed multimedia journalists used lights for interviews. The traditional crew used lights sparingly in circumstances when they were not pressed for a deadline. In many instances however, lights weren’t used even if time was not a concern. It was a matter of effort by the videographer.

There is evidence of de-skilling in some of the newsrooms. At WEWS-TV in Cleveland, Ohio, the entire staff was trained as multimedia journalists. The trainer, the operations manager, noticed the individuals were losing their strengths as they learned new skills.

*“And the photographers side, they’re worrying so much about the story that their technical side is failing…Photographers who have been shooting for 20, 30 years, are forgetting to get sequence shots, cutaways because they’re so worried about getting back and writing the script…the reporters, they’re so worried about the camera stuff that they’re forgetting about this interview, they’re forgetting about the story.”*

* *Operations Manager, WEWS-TV, Cleveland, Ohio.*

The operations manager noticed the difference in the younger employee in comparison to the experienced reporter or photographer. It was difficult for experienced workers to adapt to the new tasks, while the younger staff adapted quickly.

*“The reporter, they’re losing the story. You’re noticing that their storytelling is lost. The ones who had shot before, and, and we have 2 younger ones, they’re in their 20s, they’ve shot before, so it really hasn’t been a problem for them. I mean, not that their story telling is that great, but I didn’t think it has diminished, they just jumped back into the role of the MMJ. And so they continue doing what they do.”*

*– Operations Manager, WEWS-TV, Cleveland, Ohio.*

Specifically, the management of WEWS-TV mandated that the staff be transformed into single news production units. It was extremely emotional and difficult for the staff to adjust.

*“ I’ve had grown men crying. They just, “ I can’t deal with this. I can’t do this. I can’t do this. And I’ve turned into the big cheerleader going, ‘Yes, you can’. I don’t sell them the corporate line, but I tell them, ‘this is what corporate has told us to do. So, you’ve got to do this. I will help you do this. We have to do it, one way or the other.’”*

* *Operations Manager, WEWS-TV, Cleveland, Ohio.*

Journalists confronted with the requirement to change production methods hesitate to conform to the management policies because as Breed (1955) revealed, the expectations of their colleagues and strong attachment to the group is a force in the adoption process (Breed, 1955; 326-55). At WKYC-TV, although management is encouraging the use of the new production method, the culture is discouraging adoption.

***‘****We have several editors who are not going to be able to pick up a camera and carry it. There are several photographers…there is no way they could be able to tell the story. They can’t do their own jobs well enough.”*

*– Operations Manager, WKYC-TV*

*‘I don’t like it. Don’t like it. You put a 20 year old that just got out of college and they are all eager, they will run straight into a train just so that they can, “Hey, man I was there. I got it…uh huh”, but you wait two or three years down the line and you realize that you are just another cog in a big machine and a machine that does not care about you.’*

*- Television News Photographer, WKYC-TV*

*‘I think the viewer suffers. I think the quality suffers. I think the temptation to cut corners, becomes so great the truth that you are telling on TV may only be a half truth because you, you had half your attention to the task at hand.’*

*– Reporter, WKYC-TV*

***H2: Is the act of videotaping and editing impacting the reporting of news?***

By the 2000s, news packages use more than twice the number of sound bites in a news package. The MMJ or single news production unit uses nearly three times the number of sound bites in their news packages.



There are several areas of significance in the use of sound bites. Sound bites incorporate attributed source information (by the presence of the interviewed individual who directly attributes information) into a news story. As we have seen the length of the news story has not changed; it is the internal structure that has changed. The multimedia journalist uses more sound bites than the traditional reporter. It may be the result of researching stories. As dictated by the ethnographic subjects, and discussed in the next chapter, the news crews of the 1970s had less products to produce daily than today’s news crews.

The number of edits has more than doubled since the 1970s. The reasons could be directly linked to the technology used. In the 1970s, film stock was transferred and editing was completed in a much cruder method in comparison to the standard of today. It may be the result of a ‘postclassical’ breakdown of spatial continuity also witnessed in filmmaking. The visual trends of Hollywood and television may have mirrored themselves, as audiences are attracted to the particular style of the day (Bordwell, 1006: 123-124).





From the 1970s sample, 58 percent of the news stories included a ‘piece to camera’ or a stand-up. Of those stories using a stand-up, 19 percent of the length of the news package consisted of the stand-up. The significance of the percentage is the amount of time taken with one element attributed directly to the reporter on camera. A stand-up and the voiceover is a creation of the producer of the news package. The reporter collects a ‘sound bite’ by interviewing another individual. Using the graph below, the typical news package was constructed with 37 percent of the final product consisting of information directly attributed to a source by using the interviewed individual’s voice.

Stand-ups are also considered difficult for multimedia journalist, as it requires the journalist to record the element in front of a camera without an operator. Newer cameras have a built in monitor which flips out in order for the reporter to use it to better perform a variety of skills. The flip out monitor should encourage single news production units to record and use more stand-ups, despite the difficulty of recording themselves in front of the camera. This may be reflected in the decrease of stand-up and why only 10 percent of the sample of 2010 MMJs used a stand-up in the structure of the news package.



Multimedia journalists are less likely to use standups in their news packages. Often, it is difficult to videotape a stand-up as an MMJ because of the awkwardness of shooting the element. Reporter involvement with an interview subject is also difficult. They may also be using the package to front a ‘live’ shot in the field or present the story live on the set. In that case, a stand-up may not be viewed as necessary.

*‘Most times, reporter involvement is not necessary, it’s just to say, “Hey there’s a reporter here.” With 95% of the time, reporter involvement meaning the reporter needs to be on camera.’ - News Director, WSTM-TV (Syracuse, New York) - 2009.*



***H3: Are there unseen residual effects caused by the use of multimedia journalists in television news?***

According to the subjects of the ethnographic study, the technological advancement of the production equipment creates new opportunities for management to utilize more staffing options. It seems the transition to smaller equipment has removed gender restrictions. Technology is considered a gendered entity (Oldenziel, 1999: 11) because of social norms and physical reasons. Traditionally males were the crafts performers, as the work was considered ‘laborious’. This study observed hesitancy to train female reporters in traditional modes of production but eagerness to train them to utilizing the new technology. Newer, lighter technology liberates the technology from being a laborious activity to an accessible tool for any individual regardless of physical ability (Hubbard, 2001; 153-155). Therefore, those who were hesitant to use heavy, constraining equipment are much readily adapting to the lighter, smaller and easily transported tools.

Gender seems to play a part in the hiring practice at WKYC-TV. The MMJ’s hired at WKYC-TV are all women. It can be argued that the newer equipment is lightweight and not physically demanding and thus, managers feel it is suitable for all reporters to operate, not only men. However, there may be gender prejudice toward large traditional cameras as being unsuitable for ‘reporters’ to use in their transition to the single news production units. The smaller, lighter digital cameras are seen as a catalyst for implementing the new production model. The technological advancement of the production equipment creates new opportunities for management to utilize more staffing options. While studying traditional crews, it was noted that female reporters were reluctant to attempt craftwork while covering a news story. It was deemed inappropriate by both practitioners and the general public for female reporters to carry equipment. The craftsperson, usually a man, was expected to carry all the equipment and comments were made whenever a female reporter carried a tripod. In not only a gender specific way, but in a hierarchy of importance, the reporter was viewed as being ‘above’ manual work. As a participant observer, comments were made to me for not helping the female single news production unit, but no such comments were made when observing males. It may be argued that the act of carrying a piece of equipment is perceived as the role of the less important individual, or of men. The belief system was not only the public’s perception but also operated within the newsroom. It was clear that reporters believed that their position in the newsrooms was higher in status than the crafts individuals’. Asking a traditional reporter to perform craft skills was akin to asking the reporter to lower their status in the newsroom.

In other fields, women face marginalization because of the technical nature of the adapted craft. They face a stigmatized subculture and becoming an oddity among their colleagues because of their gender (Wyer et al., 2001: 122). Ethnographic research revealed several cases of gender bias in newsrooms but it was found to be less prevalent in the fully implemented newsrooms adapting to the single news production units. Based on interviews and observation, it is clear that it is the fear of additional tasks and loss of jobs that threaten co-workers rather than gender. However, gender bias was associated with the reluctance to adapt. The science of videotaping news stories is considered complex in traditional newsrooms and less so in converged newsrooms. If the science is perceived to be simple, then women are believed to be able to adapt (Wyer et al., 2001: 124). Women who are portrayed as scientists, or in this case technologist, are often associated with the message of ease-of-use technical or analytical equipment. In this way, the technology is viewed as acceptable.

***H4: Can a conscience of an MMJ be found in the “authorship or ownership” of a story?***

The deterioration of the news product seems to be a concern for all of the individuals in the study. The utilization of the multimedia journalist reflects a lowering of ethical standards brought about by the intense production workflow. The acquisition of raw materials, in this case videotaping, is seen as an inconvenience and not as a skill.

The most concerning element of the transition to the multimedia journalist is the idea those who practice this form of journalism will believe it to be the norm in years to come. There seems to be little turning back from this trend, and the model of the multimedia journalist will be used for some time. If the product of television news were a toy made in China, there would be safeguards against an inferior product. There is no peer organization or government body guarding the integrity of the contents of the product of journalism. What was revealed by this study is that the product, the news package, is being made efficiently and with high productivity to appease the convergence of media. Business is satisfied with the disassociation of the Fourth Estate, in fact none of the managers I spoke with knew the meaning of the term unless prompted to discuss the significance of journalistic responsibility. In the process of selecting news stories, some stories that are complex or less attractive to the audience are not gathered, in that respect the communities appear to be unaware of the ignored content the news organization do not report. In some ways, it appears to be unintentional of the news stations because of the age and experience of the reporters on staff who are young individuals without homes, children, or vested interests in the community. The reporters, upon choosing what stories are significant to the community began to inject their editorial decisions based on their own experience. The exclusion of perspectives, the insistence on repetitive sources due to time constraints, and the lack of research will be encouraged in the name of productivity. Public relations will become the source of information, not enterprising journalism. Stories will be chosen based on the number of “hits” or the popularity of one age group over another. The inventory of ‘surveillance’ video and other visual trinkets will line the showcase of the ‘store.’

Management views workers’ skills in terms of what benefits the organization. The perception of a worker’s skill focuses on workers’ attitude, commitment, and motivation and on specific task competence (Thursfield, 2000: 85). Thursfield (2000) looks at the de-skilling process as way to replace the subjective will of humans in the methods of construction. Yet, it would assume de-skilling leads to automation, which cannot be said of the single news production unit. It may be argued that the current application of technology serves to produce an electronically controlled division of labor, and in the process of learning the skills, the worker goes through five stages (Thursfield, 2000: 16). The stages necessary to learn a skill are novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. It is by moving through these stages that the worker acquire skills and experience. It must be acknowledged that the evidentiary findings of this study may be based on observing workers who have not gone through the entire set of stages and are not expert workers. Similarly, the perceptions of the workforce by management may lead to misconceptions of skill as the management elicits the cooperation and consent of workers, which is necessary to the production of surplus profit and to managers’ own performance at work. Therefore, management perceptions of skill are ultimately shaped by their role in securing valorization for the firm and securing their own position in it (Burawoy, 1978: 300-312).

Workers may also have an inflated opinion of their own sets of skills. The notion of fame is attractive for young reporters (Pearson, 1988: 132), (Ursell, 2000: 819-821) and it seems to be an alluring reward despite the amount of work required of the single news production unit (Saltzis et al., 2008: 222). Young journalists are in the ‘game’ to become famous (Hobsbawn, 2006: 34). A young individual’s drive and effort toward accomplishing goals can be referred to as the Galatea Effect (Kreitner, 2010: 199), (Eden, 1991: 770-780), (Martocchi et al, 1994: 358). In a Pygmalion manner, news directors have an expectation that their belief system will be adopted by the multimedia journalists, and that this will ensure their behavior and performance, are in line with the directors’ expectations. A ‘halo effect’ affects their performance, as failures of the individual units seem to be interpreted as the failure of the news management, therefore it is greatly desired the employee succeeds (Gordon, 1987: 44). The single news production units are then judged by an equity theory of social comparison. They are compared with the performance of the other units (Gordon, 1987: 103), not with the traditionalists. The self-serving bias of the young single news production units limits their own perceptions of their inabilities (Kreitner, 2010: 205). The conclusion seems to be that there is little blame for any mistakes or shortcomings. Any criticism of the newsroom or the single news production units is viewed as an attack on the organization. The insular nature of the newsroom creates a groupthink rating of the external criticism as unjustified and false. There seems to be a striving to validate the perceptions of reality within a newsroom, no matter how faulty or unrealistic they may be (Meier, 2009: 7-8). According to the observed veteran reporters, the enthusiasm of youth is important to the process of the idea of multi-skilling.

*“I call them 20/20 kids. 20 years old, paying them 20,000 a year, work them twenty hours a day. When they finally wake up at age 27, and realize they don’t have anything, they will just plug another 20 year old in and start them at the bottom again. 20 years old paying $20,000 a year and work them 20 hours a day. You don’t need a life kid, just listen to me, I’ll help you. Think of all the great places you are going to go. At their own expense.” – Brian Johnson, News Videographer, WKYC-TV*

News directors, with directives from corporate executives, are building a culture of journalism by marketing. The news directors dictate the story from the moment it is conceived in the morning meeting. It is passed down in a Tayloristic directive as they supervise the creation. Older and experienced journalists would not tolerate the heavy-handed enforcement of news stories, yet the younger and desperate employee is eager to please. The convention of the “20/20 kids” appears to be destined to become a successful business practice, and this will have a greater impact than technology or the creation of the single news production unit.

The future newsrooms will be a changing staff of inexperienced, eager, and unsettled individuals seeking to find fame and fortune. Their salaries will be meager, and they will need to find additional employment to make ends meet, or rely on the wealth of parents or spouses. This model will succeed despite the quality of the product they produce, as the corporations will regard the work of journalists to be day labor, sufficient enough to manufacture a product. The widgets will be made, the product will be bought, and the consumer none the wiser.

*‘There are people who can differentiate between (stations) but then there are plenty of people who just generally see you as the “media” and I think that is a frustration for me because I think we try hard to stand out…It gets frustrating at times because you should always treat the viewer like the customer is always right.’ – VP, Promotions.*

If, as this study suggests, the news product is not structurally changed by the method of production, then the method appears to be capable of fulfilling the requirements of journalism. In the observed news organizations, there seems to be a sense of the ‘genie’ being let out of the bottle. The corporations and local news management seem to have released a force upon news production, which seems irreversible. In this study, the majority of crafts individuals and reporters believed technology was the excuse for the changes to the production model, and that the changes were not necessary. There was a sense that the act of journalism was difficult to perform in the traditional sense and the introduction of the multi-skilled journalist made it even more difficult. Theoretically, the negative trends of journalism (Schudson, 2003: 133), (Bourdieu, 1996: 26), (McChesney et al., 2010: 48) will not be eliminated because of the multimedia journalist instead there may be a rise in those areas of concern already creating fissures in the ethos of societal responsibility. It appears that, regardless of the theoretical implications of journalism, the multimedia journalist is viewed as a viable business model.

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1. ‘As a rule of thumb, field notes should aim principally to record, not comment or rush to make wider interpretations or theoretical connections (Hansen et al, 1998: 55) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)