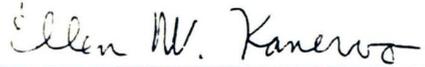


**NEWSPAPER EDITORS' VIEWS
ON RESPONSIBLE REPORTING
OF SOCIAL PROTEST**

PATRICIA FERRIER

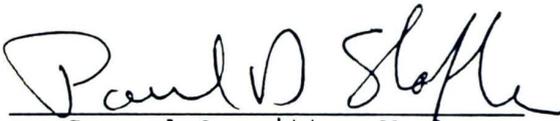
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Newspaper Editors' Views
on Responsible Reporting
of Social Protest

A Thesis
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Patricia Ferrier

May 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Paul Shaffer and Dr. Reece Elliott, professors of Speech, Communication and Theater at Austin Peay State University, contributed immeasurably to this work both in and out of the classroom, and their support is acknowledged with deep appreciation.

Sue Ball made this effort much more pleasant than it could have been, and her efficiency and emotional support were graciously offered and gratefully accepted.

The editors across the United States who responded so generously to a request for their insight and the journalists who listened and offered their opinions typify the professionals who are committed to improving community newspapers.

Matthew Ferrier and Paul Ferrier have always (often unknowingly) forced the author to organize priorities and do more than could be thought possible. For their incentive, their irrepressible senses of humor and often irreverent shows of support, their mother is grateful.

Finally, without Dr. Ellen Kanervo this study would never have been begun, let alone completed. She exemplifies the best that can be expected in both academia and newsrooms: talent, generosity, dedication, and a demand for excellence. The author is grateful for having the opportunity to learn from her.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of editorial decision-making in the reporting of social protest in community newspapers. The results indicate that editors see their decision-making role as a dilemma when deciding where or whether to publish reports of protest. Daily and non-daily editors were asked to complete a survey requesting responses to questions designed to measure how editors decide whether to publish reports on the front page, whether they feel a responsibility for perceptions of those reports, and what criteria they use in their decision-making. The study indicates disparate criteria for decision-making, ranging from the number of protesters and the topic of the protest to what other news is available for publication. The larger the group of protesters, however, the more likely it is that reports of that protest will appear on the front page. Most editors report a dichotomy between recognizing that the newspaper should be used by all groups in the community and a sense that the editors are manipulated by people seeking coverage.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, a journalist's role has been to watch the events of the world and report them to the public, which can use that information to make informed choices and decisions (Klaidman and Beauchamp, 1987). Some studies, however, report that journalists suffer from a lack of credibility with the public--the people whom journalists claim to represent--and a frequent criticism is that journalists create the news, distort events and contribute to a misunderstanding of news (Tichenor, et al., 1980). We have studies to indicate how and why journalists report on some things and not on others but, sometimes, this basic decision about what constitutes news for a particular day can lead to perceptions from consumers that the reporters have, indeed, created news where, before media attention, there was none (Fink, 1988).

Some of this news is the result of planned campaigns by potential newsmakers in which the journalists, for all of their perceived power, are, like puppets, manipulated by their news sources. The journalists and their audiences are the targets of potential news-makers who seek to influence public opinion through attention-getting public events (Wolfsfeld, 1984). Tuchman (1978) wrote that news is events "not issues, as the stuff and substance of hard

news. And hard news is itself the stuff and substance of daily news coverage. Deemed factual, hard-news stories about occurrences take precedence over other stories (p. 139).

The Role of Media Events as News

These media events, which are similar to Daniel Boorstin's seminal study of pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1963), are staged in public solely to attract the attention of the media. Boorstin appears to limit the pseudo-event to public relations events, staged attention-getters created solely to seek free advertising for a business, organization, or, for example, a political candidate or officeholder. Boorstin (1963) wrote:

The making of the illusions which flood our experience has become the business of America, some of its most honest and most necessary and most respectable business. I am thinking not only of advertising and public relations, but of all the activities which purport to inform and comfort and improve and educate and elevate us (p. 17).

Boorstin (1963) defined the pseudo-event with four characteristics:

1. It is not spontaneous but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.

2. It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported. . . . Its success is measured by how widely it is reported . . . the announcement is given out in advance 'for future release' and written as if the event had occurred in the past. . . .

3. Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. . . .

4. Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel's thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one (pp. 22-23).

Boorstin (1963) uses the hotel's anniversary as one example of a pseudo-event. By staging a lavish ceremony to mark the anniversary and by feeding the media superlatives about the hotel, the hotel achieves an importance it may not have had before it was reported. The public could attach a greater significance to the hotel's existence as a result of its making the news.

This study agrees that media events share some of the characteristics of Boorstin's pseudo-event, but it sharply limits the event to something that is not so obviously a public relations project, although it unquestionably is an attempt at getting publicity. For the purpose of this study, a media event, unlike the

pseudo-event, does not necessarily meet Boorstin's last two criteria. That is, on the surface, a media event can appear to be bona fide news: a demonstration or a protest, sponsored by a particular group which may organize the event to gain recognition for itself, regardless of the cause it appears to promote. These are not always obvious public relations-related activities but could be seen as legitimate news. At best, these media events could bring into public view an unjust situation which may need to be changed for the good of the community. At worst, they arouse controversy or create or intensify conflict within the community with the ultimate blame being laid at the door of the newspaper, radio or television reporter.

An Instance of Social Protest

In 1987, leaders of the Montgomery County, Tennessee, chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Memphis, Tennessee-based Commission on Religion and Racism (CORR) participated in protests aimed at the Clarksville, Tennessee, Police Department and city government. The catalyst, the criterion which met Fedler's (1993) timeliness measure for news, was the group's protest against the white police officer, who had shot and killed a black soldier January 16, 1987, after the soldier escaped from a military stockade where he was being held pending trial on drug trafficking charges (Davis, January 17, 1987).

Two weeks after the shooting, the NAACP announced a meeting to which all of the media from Montgomery County and Nashville, Tennessee, were invited. The reporters were asked to attend the press conference at a city-owned recreational facility. When the reporters showed up for the meeting, they were directed to a church on the next block, where the group's leaders were prepared to address the media. One leader, speaking from the altar, began his prepared speech, but, when a television crew appeared nearly 10 minutes after he had started, he stopped and, after the television cameras began recording, repeated his statement from the beginning.

At the meeting, the reporters were told of crimes which local police officers were alleged to have committed against black people in the community. Victims were presented who told of abuses and violations of civil rights suffered at the hands of these police officers. A list of charges was read, and, when a reporter objected that one of the charges had been investigated by a grand jury and dismissed, a leader of the group said the dismissal was more evidence of an alleged cover-up by purported white rulers of the community. The victims who had spoken to the reporters from the altar were ushered out of the church before reporters could question them (Davis, January 31, 1987).

After a grand jury declined to indict the officer,

the NAACP called for a federal grand jury probe (Davis, February 14, 1987). In April, 12 NAACP members and representatives of the Commission of Religion and Racism staged a sit-in at the mayor's office, demanding that the officer be fired. They were arrested when they refused to leave (Lynch, April 18, 1987). When a Clarksville City Council Police Committee cleared the officer of charges, the NAACP announced a 10-mile march to Fort Campbell to demand why military officials had released no information from the Army's investigation into the shooting (Davis, April 22, 1987).

In 1988, CORR members surprised the Clarksville-Montgomery County Board of Education when four demonstrators held a sit-in inside the building, protesting alleged white supremacy in the school system (Sipes, September 14, 1988). Group members called local reporters hours before the demonstration, stating that the protesters would be arrested at the end of the day. Press releases were delivered to newspapers and television and radio stations and to the home of at least one reporter. The group also distributed to the media copies of a federal lawsuit filed that day against the school system, charging it with racism and demanding the expulsion of several officials.

As promised, four protesters were arrested at the end of the business day when they refused to leave the building. On the second day of the demonstration, three

more were arrested. All were charged with criminal trespass for refusing to leave the building when it closed for the night. The media were again given fact sheets listing charges of white supremacy and racism in local schools. The sheets included no names, dates or places to support the charges. When organizers were asked for specific details, they refused to name the officials involved so no investigation by reporters was possible. On the second day of the protest, CORR members told reporters they had no particular reason for choosing Clarksville as the protest site. When the leader was asked why he had chosen Clarksville, he replied, "Because we're here. . . . We're seeking world publicity" (Sipes, September 15, 1988).

The demonstration on April 17, 1987, attracted 12 protesters, then the demonstrations grew to about 60 participants on April 24, and to about 150 on May 2 (Davis, May 3, 1987). At the two-day sit-ins in 1988, a total of seven people protested inside the building and about 20 marched outside, but each event was covered by three Nashville television crews, two Clarksville radio stations, and two newspapers--one from Clarksville and one from Nashville. Demonstrators were outnumbered by the media almost three to one, but the story led news broadcasts on all local radio stations and on one Nashville television station and was on the front page above the fold in Clarksville's The Leaf-Chronicle. The Nashville Tennessean

printed the story on an inside section front below the fold.

The prominence of the reports may have led readers and viewers to assume that the protest was far more widespread than it actually was. The protests were, by this study's definition, a series of media events staged solely to attract attention. They also may have been a public sign that a newsworthy story needed attention, but the news in each of the events was the activity itself.

The Editor's Dilemma

Were the NAACP and CORR protests a sign of legitimate news or were they, as Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien recognize, an opportunity for the media to be accused of sensationalizing, blowing things out of proportion, covering up, and not paying attention to all sides (cited by Graber, 1990)? In some quarters, the media are recognized as playing a vital role in a democratic society (Hertog & McLeod, 1995). On the other hand, the media are often accused of supporting the status quo.

"Public protest is often the only method available for less powerful or socially marginal groups to gain access to the press," Hertog and McLeod (1995, p. 1) reported, but the authors cited studies showing that press coverage presents so-called deviant groups as illegitimate and, when groups do get coverage, it doesn't focus on the group's motivations. Instead it focuses on the protest itself.

It is this power to focus public attention--and the accompanying responsibility to use it wisely--that is the focus of this study. Specifically, this study will present the views of editors who have the responsibility of deciding where or whether to publish reports of social protest, discuss whether they feel a responsibility for their decision, and consider what criteria are included in their decision-making processes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Disguised as news, media events can pose a real dilemma for the editor and reporter who are charged with accurately and responsibly reporting the activities in the community. Sometimes, a media event can stem from an obvious publicity stunt, similar to the one that provoked Frank Ritter, former reader advocate for The Tennessean, to devote a Sunday column to a discussion of news. When a Nashville, Tennessee, radio station announced it would drop 103 live turkeys from an airplane and whoever caught one could keep it for Thanksgiving Day dinner, people complained to The Tennessean, threatening to cancel their newspaper subscriptions if the radio station carried out its plans. The newspaper was held responsible for the stunt because it advertised on the radio station. Presumably, other advertisers, such as furniture stores, restaurants, etc., were not held equally as responsible. Hundreds of people tied up the telephone lines to the Nashville Humane Society, exasperating volunteer workers.

Ritter (1988) wrote:

Now, if you operate a newspaper, what do you do? Do you report on this . . . or, believing that it's a scam . . . to get publicity . . . do you ignore it? The initial impulse was to ignore it. . . . Editors asked, "Why play into their hands by

publicizing their turkey drop stunt?" It's a good question. It's similar to the question reporters and editors ask when confronted with a police report of a bomb scare. Do the media, by reporting the event, encourage more bomb scares? . . . (E)ditors often have decided not to report on bomb scares. But if the disruption that ensues from such an incident is large enough, there is no choice but to report it (p. 2G).

The Tennessean editors chose to report the turkey drop because of its effect on the Humane Society. The news, then, was the Humane Society's struggle to cope with hundreds of complaints--but the catalyst for this news was an obvious publicity gimmick, and, since the radio station was named in the report, it achieved publicity. A letter also was published on the newspaper's editorial page from the Humane Society director, complaining about the radio station. In his column about the editors' dilemma in trying to deal responsibly with the situation, Ritter (1988) admitted that the newspaper had played into the hands of the radio station, but that is the type of problem reporters face every day. "Sometimes they make the right decision, sometimes they don't" (Ritter, 1988, p. 2G).

Unfortunately, Ritter doesn't recommend the criteria journalists should use when trying to make what he called "the right decision" (Ritter, 1988, p. 2G). Although

Ritter's dilemma was a result of an obvious publicity stunt, as he recognizes in his column, the stunt itself was not news--until it was reported by the newspaper. The reporting of the event gave it--and the radio station which sponsored it--public attention it clearly lacked without the media's involvement.

The discussion among the editors which Ritter (1988) describes gives us a clue about an apparent lack of established criteria which could help guide journalists who are manipulated into helping to publicize an event by commenting on it in the newspaper. This dilemma is typical of the questions the journalist faces when confronting other media events--including the focus of this study, protesters or demonstrators.

The Nature of News

In the newsroom, reporters typically are assigned beats, areas of the community which they comb constantly, searching for information to share with their audiences (Harriss et al., 1992). In the daily search for news, the reporter's attention is naturally caught by anything out of the ordinary, seemingly aware, as Boorstin (1963) wrote, that some of these unusual events are deliberately planned, scheduled, coordinated, and timed solely for the purpose of attracting the attention of reporters looking for stories. The reporter brings to the newsroom all of the collected information about the day's events and gives

a summary of that information to the editors who decide whether to include those events in the day's edition.

Editors can be overwhelmed by the amount of information which, theoretically at least, the public has a right to know. Bartley (1981) wrote, "The unordered reality of any given day pours down on the editor . . . in an unmanageable torrent. He is asked to sort out the interesting from the insignificant" (pp. 196-198).

The editor decides what is news and what is not news through stereotypes, Bartley (1981) said:

He has in his mind certain metaphors or themes he will use to organize the news, and he imposes these pre-existing structures upon reality. This is the only way a day's events can conceivably be sorted out and organized by a night's deadline (p. 194).

Ultimately, however, hampered by the physical limitations of time and space, the journalist coping with reporting on a crisis relies "on human instincts, a nose for when (she) is being told the truth or a story," Bartley (1981) said (p. 197). That reliance on instinct, however, can distort the reality behind the truth. Every reporter, uses, according to Comstock (1981), a frame to introduce a story to the readers and, consequently--perhaps unconsciously--influence the audience. The frame contains the context and the reason for the coverage, according

to Comstock (1981), who cites research by Todd Gitlin which concludes that, during coverage of anti-war protesters in the 1960s and early 1970s:

(T)hese 'frames' emphasized dangerous extremism, immature adventuresomeness, and counterbalancing pro-war protesters. The result was to give the reader or viewer the impression of drama and a balance of public expression that was not there. At the same time, the exposure motivated the movement to act so as to seek additional coverage, while the media's continuing emphasis on opposition to the Vietnam war and draft resistance portrayed the New Left as outraged over specific issues readily resolvable by the establishment, rather than as opposed to the basic tenets of the society on a broad front as it saw itself doing. By choosing one from a variety of possible ways of covering the New Left, the media defined for the movement options of how to reach a broader public (p. 243-244).

Again, we have the question: How do we responsibly and appropriately choose frames for stories about social protest? How do we know when to take protesters seriously and when to ignore them? Fink (1988) said that, even if we make the correct decision and report the media event in a manner commensurate with its impact on the community, a reporter carries a tremendous power to influence.

Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980) wrote:

Newspapers and other mass media, if they report a conflict at all, contribute to the legitimation of the conflict and/or certain points of view that are part of the conflict. . . . The very recognition of a conflict confers a new status to the issue, even if the news story (or editorial) contains negative references to individuals or groups that are party to the controversy. Protest group leaders are well aware of such possibilities and frequently seek to create situations that focus media attention on the protest [italics added] regardless of whether the media reporting . . . (has) positive or negative connotations . . . (p. 114).

It is this dilemma of influencing public opinion through media action that should concern journalists. Whether to report or ignore the event and whether to quote one source or another are choices which may affect public perception of the event. Strentz (1989) asserted that the way in which a reporter collects information helps editors determine which information will be disseminated, and the reporter's demeanor, along with the reader's attitude, determine how that information is received. Strentz (1989) wrote:

What news will reach the audience has been decided long before the first word is written . . . as a matter

of the competence of the reporter and the nature of the reporter's relationship with the news sources. The reporter and news source are . . . accomplices--often unintentionally--in determining the content of the news" (p. vii).

Fink (1988) offers five points at which a journalist must evaluate the choices: story selection, source selection, fact selection and arrangement, language selection and timing and context. A seemingly innocent choice of one source over another, one word in the place of an alternative can influence the reader's interpretation of the story's meaning.

Some media scholars might recommend objectivity as the main criterion for reporting social protest. Surely, a non-biased recital of the facts of the event would be an honorable way to deal with the conflict. But true objectivity is not possible; all we can strive to reach is fairness (Tichenor et al., 1980).

Objectivity as a Standard for Responsibility

It is the power and real chance for causing harm that should concern journalists who have the opportunity to create news, deliberately or unwittingly. They can create a crime wave if they are not careful (Fishman, 1988). The Society of Professional Journalists (1993) lists truth as the ultimate goal of journalism. In its Code of Ethics adopted in 1926, then reviewed in 1973, 1984, and 1987,

the society (Black, 1993) lists objectivity as a separate goal. Objectivity, then, appears to be only one part of truth, vital to truth but not the journalist's only goal. Objectivity is the

easy road intellectually . . . but . . . the journalist has that obligation . . . The consumers of print journalism want to see an editor's opinion on the editorial page, but we need his or her judgment as to significance, relevance and truth reflected in news stories (Roberto C. Goizueta, quoted by Fink, 1988, pp. 20-21).

Objectivity could be defined as the non-partisan reporting of the facts, but many consumers hold journalists responsible for interpreting those facts--as well as for reporting them. If a journalist is responsible for determining not only the facts of the story but also its truth, some scholars lay the credit for the change in focus to former Senator Joseph McCarthy, who created havoc with the "who said what and when" style of journalism of the 1950s. McCarthy kept one jump ahead of journalists who found themselves with no time to find rebuttals or confirmations to his charges of communism. When a United States senator spoke, what he said immediately became news. Fink (1988) reported, "It was somebody else's job to determine whether it was truth." (p. 21).

Boorstin (1963) said that reporters were McCarthy's

staunchest allies, writing:

He had a diabolical fascination, and an almost hypnotic power over news-hungry reporters. . . . Many hated him; all helped him. They were victims of what one of them called their 'indiscriminate objectivity.' . . . Senator McCarthy's political fortunes were promoted almost as much by newsmen who considered themselves his enemies as by those few who were his friends. Without the active help of all of them, he could never have created the pseudo-events which brought him notoriety and power. . . . Newspapermen were his most potent allies, for they were his co-manufacturers of pseudo-events. . . . Honest newsmen and the unscrupulous Senator McCarthy were in separate branches of the same business" (p. 33).

The McCarthy style of media manipulation forced a change in American journalism which could no longer rely on charge-and-response reporting. Watergate and the Vietnam War added impetus for continued change, according to Fink (1988).

Some journalists are comfortable limiting their role to reporting without interpreting the data, but others object to that type of media-swaddling. Glasser (1986) wrote:

Objective reporting has . . . robbed journalists of their passion and their perspective. Objective

reporting has transformed journalism . . . into the technique of report-writing. . . . Journalists have become a . . . relatively passive link between sources and audiences. The objective reporter tends to function as a translator --translating the specialized language of sources into a language intelligible to a lay audience (p. 373).

Taylor (1992), discussing the journalist's difficulty in reporting on the Gulf War amid military censorship, wrote:

. . . Journalists are, after all, only human beings. They do not expect, nor can they be expected, to see and report everything. They can chronicle only what they do see, or are allowed to see, and even then their judgment of what is important is determined by the same sort of experience, perception, education, even emotions, that affect all human beings in their attempts at 'putting reality together'. . . . (A)ny one reporter can witness only a slice of the action. The reports they file are by definition selective and subjective, a representation of reality as they see it" (p. 12).

Some scholars reject objectivity as a myth. Lambeth (1986) wrote, "Objective reporting, in a strict sense, is impossible given the subjectivity in assembling facts

and the frequent necessity for choosing to emphasize one set of facts rather than another" (p. 5). Glasser (1986) and others recommend a transcending of objectivity with a sense of responsibility on the part of the journalist--a move which may require the abandoning of objectivity as the reporter's standard of reliability.

Responsibility as Virtue

Glasser (1986) argues against objectivity as a standard for responsibility:

Objective reporting virtually precludes responsible reporting, if by responsible reporting we mean a willingness on the part of the reporter to be accountable for what is reported.

Objectivity requires only that reporters be held accountable for how they report, not what they report

"Objective reporting is biased against the very idea of responsibility; the day's news is viewed as something journalists are compelled to report, not something they are responsible for creating" (pp. 369-370).

The government has little control over the press in the United States and, although few people would advocate government supervision of the press, the public would be correct in demanding responsible reporting.

Hulteng (1981) wrote:

(A) press guaranteed against government interference--and effectively shielded from most other forms of external supervision--represents a massive power center. Since power, if wielded irresponsibly, is capable of inflicting damage on individuals, on institutions, and on society in general . . . that damage may be only an annoyance in some instances; it may be mortal in others.

It can happen when an erroneous report is amplified disastrously by the great media megaphones It can happen when the news is systematically shaped so as to distort the public's perception of reality (pp. 212-213).

Research Questions

It is this power to influence the reader's perception of reality, the power to increase or even bring about conflict in a community that is the focus of this study, which asks four questions and posits four hypotheses.

RQ1: What, according to the survey sample, are the identifying characteristics of legitimate protest?

RQ2: Do newspapers have written policies to guide editors in deciding whether or not to cover social protest?

RQ3: Are there criteria on which editors can agree which can be used to guide them in deciding how to deal with the makers of media events?

RQ4: Do editors feel responsible for the effects of their newspapers' reports on social protest?

Hypotheses

H1: The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the more likely it is to publish on the front page reports of social protest in that community.

H2: Editors are guided by the maxim that the public has the right to know, give the readers the facts, and let them decide the truth for themselves.

H3: Newspapers are more likely to report only on the protest than they are to investigate the claims made by the protesters.

H3a: Daily newspapers are more apt to investigate the protesters' claims than are weekly newspapers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

For this research, a constant interval sample was drawn from the daily and weekly newspapers listed in the 1992 edition of The International Yearbook published by The Editor & Publisher Co.

Subjects

The directory includes a listing of all daily and non-daily newspapers published for the general audience in the United States. Because the focus of this research is to discover how a newspaper reports on social protest in that community, omitted from this study are newspapers targeted to specific audiences, such as religious and college or university newspapers and newspapers published outside the United States. Using that same criterion, news agencies and syndicate services, such as the Associated Press, Knight-Ridder News Service, Reuters, and United Press International, were not included because, again, those are more national in scope rather than community-based. Although they appeared in the general-interest listings, national newspapers also were omitted for the same reason that wire services and syndicates were omitted. The national newspapers listed in The International Yearbook include USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, Capper's, Journal of Commerce and Commercial, and The Investor's

Daily.

The directory of daily newspapers published in the United States is divided alphabetically by state. Newspapers in each state are listed alphabetically by city. Each individual entry includes information about the publication. For this research, data collected included only the name of the newspaper, the mailing address, and the name of its editor, if available, to allow the survey to be mailed to a specific person. If an editor was not listed, the survey was addressed to the editor with no name specified.

Finding the Sample

To find the sample, the total number of entries--minus the omitted entries--was counted. The population for this study of daily newspapers included 1,539 daily newspapers. Since the sample included 300 newspapers, 1,539 was divided by 300, yielding an interval of 5 ($1,539/300 = 5.13$). A die was rolled, and 4 was the starting point. The sample, therefore, is the 4th, 9th, 14th, 19th newspapers listed and on through the list for a total of 300 dailies.

The random sample was drawn similarly for the non-daily newspapers. The yearbook's listings for non-daily newspapers include all "community newspapers of general interest" appearing up to three times a week. The list is arranged alphabetically by states and, within each state, by the principal community or neighborhood served by each

paper (Editor & Publisher, p. II-1).

Collecting the Data

For this study, data collected from each entry in the random sample were limited to the name of the newspaper, its mailing address and the name of the editor, if available. In many cases, the publisher and the editor were the same person and, in those situations, the survey was mailed to the publisher. If the name of the editor was not available, the survey was addressed to the newspaper and marked to the attention of the editor.

The Editor and Publisher directory lists 6,385 non-daily community newspapers of general interest published up to three times each week in the United States. Since the random sample was 300, the total was divided by that number, yielding an interval of 21 ($6,385/300=21.28$). A die was rolled, and the beginning number for drawing the sample was 2. The survey sample includes newspaper entries 2, 23, 44 and so on through 300.

Procedure

Each survey to daily and non-daily newspapers was mailed with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the research and apprising the respondent that the responses are confidential and non-identifiable and that completing and returning the survey signaled the respondent's agreement to participate in the study. Each participant was invited to request the results of the survey by mailing a request

separate from the survey. Each editor was provided a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return the survey.

Response Rate

The response rate was similar for both the daily and non-daily newspapers in the sample. Sixty-three editors of daily newspapers responded, yielding a response rate of 21% (63/300). Seventy non-daily editors responded. However, three of the responses were discarded since the editors marked on the response sheet that they represented newspaper chains or a syndicate of newspapers. That information was not included in the Editor and Publisher directory from which the sample was taken but, keeping in mind that the survey's purpose was to poll editors about social protest in their communities, the chains and syndicates were disregarded. Using that criterion, the response rate for non-daily newspapers was 22.33% (67/300).

Coding of Data

To code the survey responses for tabulation, each variable in the table was assigned a number value. Each survey response was assigned a three-digit identification number ranging from 001 for the first set of responses to 130 for the last set. The newspaper's category was identifiable because the surveys mailed to each non-daily newspaper requested only the paper's circulation. Surveys mailed to daily newspapers asked for daily and Sunday

circulations. All surveys which requested daily and Sunday circulations were included in the daily category. All others were considered non-daily newspapers. Each daily newspaper was coded 1 and each non-daily, 2. Circulation was assigned six columns. For example, a newspaper with a circulation of 4,500 was coded 004500. If the response to Question 1 was yes, the response was coded 1; a negative response was coded 2.

The survey relied on the Likert Scale for most responses, and in coding the data, a number was assigned to each response. If the editor agreed with the statement, the response was coded as 1; tend to agree, 2; neither agree nor disagree, 3; tend to disagree, 4; and disagree, 5. A non-response was coded as 0. In Question 23, editors were asked their opinion on why coverage of protest often is focused on the event instead of the underlying cause of the protest. If the editor marked a response to the statement, that statement was coded "1." If no response was marked, the statement was coded "0." If the editor marked all of the five possible responses, the coding indicated five responses of "1." If the editor did not respond to this question, five columns in the table were coded 0. The five possible responses were: Charges were so vague that they could not be investigated; No staff member available to investigate; Targets of protest declined to comment on the charges; Had time to get only charges

from protesters; and could not contact target of protest.

In the final series of questions (questions 24a through 24g) editors were asked to decide where in the newspaper they would play a protest. Again, for tabulation purposes, numbers were assigned to the responses. Front page story and photo was assigned a value of 1; front page story only, 2; front page photo only, 3; inside page story and/or photo, 4; and coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate, 5. Some editors declined to specify a spot in the newspaper, and those answers were coded 0 to indicate no response. Several editors chose multiple responses, for example, front page story and photo and coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate. Comments from editors indicated that the editors wanted to qualify their decision on placement with the reporter's recommendation. Therefore, each multiple response (1 and 5, 2 and 5, 3 and 5, or 4 and 5) was interpreted as a single response. By illustration, an editor who marked a 1 (front page photo and story) and a 5 (coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate) was considered to be recommending playing the protest with a front page photo and story if and only if a reporter investigated and believed the protest is legitimate. To incorporate those qualifications, each multiple response was coded 6 to indicate that, although the editor responded to the

questions, the editor declined to specify placement pending more information. Finally, each editor was invited to add comments about covering social protest. Selected comments are included in Chapter 5. All of the comments are included in their entirety in Appendix B. Copies of the surveys are included in Appendix A.

Building the Variables

To test the likelihood of an investigation into charges from a protest group, a value was assigned to each editor's response to Question 17. That question asked for a response to the statement: My newspaper doesn't have the staff or the money to investigate charges made by protest groups; the best we can do is report them and let the public decide. Editors also were asked to respond to each of the seven scenarios in Question 24, which asked what coverage the newspaper should allot to a protest which involved, progressively, a phone call or visit to the newsroom, a letter to a reporter, or a public demonstration involving one person, three, 10, 30 or 300 people. The response to each of the seven scenarios was assigned a numerical value and those values were added to the value assigned to the response from Question 17. The sum was the likelihood of that newspaper's investigating the charges made by protester before reporting. The likelihood of front page coverage of a protest also relied on the sum of the responses to the scenarios in Question 24.

To test the importance editors attached to their reporters' interpreting the truth of the protesters' charges before they are presented to the readers, the variable INTERPRET was devised as the sum of the values of the responses to questions 4, 5, 7, and 17. Question 4 stated "A reporter is not supposed to interpret the news and should only report on all sides of a controversy; Question 5, "Readers can make up their own minds about the truth if we print the charges and the government officials' response to the charges"; Question 7, "It's unfair to our readers and government officials to print vague, unsubstantiated charges made by a few picketers carrying signs"; and Question 17, "My newspaper doesn't have the staff or the money to investigate charges made by protest groups; the best we can do is report them and let the public decide."

Finally, newspapers were considered to have a small circulation if the editors reported a circulation between 1 and 9,999; medium, 10,000 through 24,999; and large, 25,000 through 340,000, the largest circulation reported by an editor participating in this survey.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations of this survey are recognized by the researcher:

1. The response rates for both the daily and non-daily surveys are low.

2. The survey itself limits data collected and does not permit follow-up questions to provide more in-depth questioning of the editors' decision-making processes.

Nonetheless, many of the editors provided their comments, which allow a glimpse into their thoughts of coverage of protests. Additionally, the range of circulations represented in the responses assures that small, medium, and large newspapers are included in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

When the data are analyzed, the numbers appear to support Hypothesis 1, which states that a newspaper's circulation will influence where reports of a protest in that community will be published. According to editors' responses to this survey, the smaller a newspaper's circulation, the more likely a reader is to find coverage of a protest on the front page of that newspaper. When circulation was regressed against the likelihood of an editor saying the protest would receive front page coverage, it proved to have a small but statistically significant impact on coverage decisions (Beta = .284; $p = .005$). The regression suggested that circulation accounted for about 7% of the variance in whether the protest would be published on the front page. The Pearson correlation coefficient between circulation size and the likelihood of an editor saying the protest would receive front page coverage is .245 (p is less than .05, two-tailed test).

Finally, Table 1 shows that the editors of newspapers with a smaller circulation were more likely to say they would cover the protest on the front page even before they were able to investigate the legitimacy of the protest charges. However, the large-circulation editors were twice as likely to report only after investigation (69%).

Table 1

Comparison of Newspaper Circulation
With Decision to Publish Report of Protest

	<u>Circulation</u>		
	1-9,999	10,000-24,999	25,000-340,000
Will probably publish without investigating	40 (62%)	8 (40%)	5 (31%)
Publication only after investigation	25 (38%)	12 (60%)	11 (69%)
Totals	65 (100%)	20 (100%)	16 (100%)
Chi-square = 6.3; p = .04			

Interestingly, although circulation size affected the likelihood of front page treatment even before a reporter could investigate, whether the newspaper was a daily or a non-daily had no significant influence when chi square, correlation, and regression tests were run using the type of publication (whether the newspaper is a daily or non-daily publication) as a predictor of protest coverage.

Hypothesis 2, which suggests that editors are guided by the maxim that the public has the right to know, give the readers the facts, and let them decide the truth for themselves, also is supported by this research. Of all editors responding, 81.5% agree or tend to agree with Question 5, which asked the editors to respond to the statement: "Readers can make up their own minds about the

truth if we print the charges and the government officials' response to the charges." Some differences arise when the responses are divided by whether the editor represents a daily or non-daily newspaper. Among the editors of daily newspapers, 38.1% agree and 39.7% tend to agree with that statement, for a total of 77.822%. Among the non-daily editors, 53.7% agree and 31.3% tend to agree, for a total of 85.0%.

The majority's responses, regardless of whether the editors represent daily or non-daily newspapers, support Hypothesis 2. However, a comparison of the responses to Question 5 with answers to Question 7, which states, "It's unfair to our readers and government officials to print vague, unsubstantiated charges made by a few picketers carrying signs" seems to indicate that the editors feel some sense of responsibility to their readers and the subjects of the protest for what they print. To this statement, 71.4% of the daily editors agree or tend to agree, and 64.2% of the non-daily editors agree or tend to agree that publishing vague, unsubstantiated charges is unfair.

Hypothesis 3 states that newspapers are more likely to report only on the protest than they are to investigate the claims made by the protesters. The data support Hypothesis 3 to the extent that newspapers are more likely to report only on the protest than they are to investigate

the claims made by the protesters if a relatively large number of people are involved in the protest.

To test the hypothesis, Question 17 asked the editors to respond to the statement: "My newspaper doesn't have the staff or the money to investigate charges made by protest groups; the best we can do is report them and let the public decide." Although 32.6% of all editors agree or tend to agree with that statement, 43.8% tend to disagree or disagree.

To further study whether newspapers are more likely to report only on the protest than to investigate the claims, Questions 24a through 24g gave editors a series of seven situations and asked them to indicate whether they would give the protest play on the front page with a story and photo, a front page story only, a story and/or photo on an inside page, or whether they would provide coverage only if a reporter investigated and believed the protest to be legitimate. The first situation specified that a person called the newsroom by telephone to report a grievance or problem, and the second stated that a person wrote a letter to a reporter, stating a grievance or problem. The third through seventh situations specified that people were actually demonstrating with signs in front of the government agency being targeted. The only variable in the third through seventh situations was the number of people protesting. The numbers moved from one person,

three people, 10, 30, to 300 people.

Telephone calls or letters do not seem to be catalysts for coverage of protests, according to the data. Some editors declined to specify any coverage or investigation at all, but only one editor of 116 responding indicated that the newspaper would give front-page coverage with a story and photo to a protest communicated by telephone or letter. One would publish only a front-page story for either situation, and one would publish a story and/or photo on an inside page for the protest communicated by the caller. None of 115 editors responding to the second situation opted to give inside-page coverage to the protest made in the letter. Among all editors, 94.7% would demand, before deciding where or whether to publish the story, an investigation of the protest in the telephone call, and 95.7% would require investigation of the protest in the letter.

Once the protest became public--and as the number of protesters increased--the demand for investigation by the editors declined, however. Some editors marked multiple responses as if they wanted to specify where the story would be played if--and only if--a reporter investigated. These multiple responses are not included in the percentages for actual placements of stories.

According to the data, if one person protested with a sign, 80.9% of the editors would want an investigation

before deciding whether to publish a report. With three people protesting, 71.9% would want an investigation; 10 people, 51.8%; 30 people, 31.5%; and 300 people, 21.2%.

As the number of people protesting increased, the likelihood increased that the protest would be played on the front page. With one protester, 4.3% of the editors were willing to commit the newspaper to a front page story and/or photo; another 9.6% would play it on an inside page. With three people, 7% of the editors would put the protest on the front page, and 14.8% would play it inside the newspaper.

When 10 people demonstrated, 18.8% of the editors would put it on the front page, and 19.6% would assign it to an inside page. If 30 people demonstrated in public, the protest would be reported in 52.3% of the newspapers edited by the people responding to this survey. Most (37.8%) said the report would appear on the front page, although 14.4% said they would play it on an inside page.

A protest with 300 participants is more than three times as likely to be published without an investigation, according to the editors. Nearly two-thirds (63.7%) said they would play on the front page--without an investigation--a protest with 300 protesters, compared to 21.2% who would insist on an investigation into the charges. The story would appear on an inside page in three of the newspapers (2.3%).

The numbers vary somewhat when the data are divided between daily and non-daily editors. Hypothesis 3a, which states that daily newspapers are more apt to investigate the protesters' claims than are weekly newspapers, is supported, although the relationship between the type of newspaper and investigation is weaker than the relationship between investigation and circulation regardless of whether the newspaper is a daily or non-daily. When the type of newspaper, daily or non-daily, was regressed against whether it was likely to investigate protesters' claims before reporting them, the type of newspaper showed a significant impact on investigation with a Beta of .224 ($p = .03$). The variance in investigation accounted for by type of newspaper was fairly small (4%); nevertheless, the relationship was significant. Cross-tabulation indicates that the daily newspapers are more likely to investigate the protesters' claims before publishing anything; however, the relationship in Table 2 is not statistically significant.

Table 2
Comparison of Daily and Non-Daily Newspapers
With Decision to Require Investigation of Claims

	Daily	Non-daily
Will probably publish without investigating	21 (44%)	34 (59%)
Will publish only after investigating	<u>27 (56%)</u> 48 (100%)	<u>24 (41%)</u> 58 (100%)
Chi-Square = 2.3; $p = .13$		

Research Question 2 asked whether editors have written guidelines to help them make their decision, and according to the editors surveyed, deciding where to play a report of social protest appears to be left to the editor's discretion. Few newspapers have written policies to guide the staff in deciding whether or how to cover social protest. Only nine daily and nine non-daily newspapers among the sample responding to the survey have written policies: 14.8% and 14.1% respectively. According to editors who stated the policy on the survey form, the guidelines range from "Is it newsworthy?" to "Get both sides," "Check with editor," and "Case by case decision by the publisher." The editors' responses to Question 1 are included in Appendix B.

What are some identifying characteristics of legitimate protest, as asked in Research Question 1? As shown by Hypothesis 3, the number of protesters may be one characteristic since, as one editor pointed out, "The more people a cause can attract, the more validity it probably has."

Supporting documentation could be considered a way to legitimize a protest, but daily editors are less likely to require logic or data to support a protester's claim than are non-daily editors. Daily editors are more likely to disagree with Question 6, which states, "If a protest group has no data or logic to support its claim, we should

refuse to cover its protest." Among the daily newspapers, 44.4% say the lack of data or logic should not mean a decision to not cover it. The reaction was the opposite for the non-daily editors--41.8% consider the lack of supporting data to be enough to refuse coverage.

The subject or catalyst for the protest could be seen as a determinant in whether the protester gets newspaper coverage. Questions 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 present, respectively, as possible causes of protest a personal grievance, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, age discrimination, and sexual orientation discrimination. More than half of all daily and non-daily editors say discrimination claims are not sufficient to make a protest newsworthy if no supporting data are provided. In the case of the personal grievance suggested in Question 10, 11.1% of the daily editors and 17.9% of the non-daily editors agree that such a protest is newsworthy. In every other situation, the editors appear to want supporting data, despite their response to Question 7. Among the daily editors, 7.9% agree or tend to agree that a protest charging gender discrimination is newsworthy (Question 11); and 6.3% agree or tend to agree that a protest charging racial, age or sexual orientation discrimination is newsworthy (Questions 12, 13, and 14).

The non-daily editors apparently are more willing to accept all of the discrimination claims as newsworthy,

based on their responses to Questions 11 through 14. If someone charges gender or racial discrimination, 17.9% of the non-daily editors consider it newsworthy; and age or sexual orientation discrimination, 16.4%.

Are there criteria on which editors can agree which can be used to guide them in deciding how to deal with protesters who seek news coverage, as asked in Research Question 3? Most of the editors are wary of manipulation by protesters and others who want to capitalize on publicity. When confronted with Question 22 ("If I thought someone was just trying to build a name for himself, I would not cover his demonstration"), 70.1% of all non-daily editors agreed or tended to agree, although daily editors were less likely to agree (54.0% agreed or tended to agree). Non-daily editors also are more likely to feel manipulated by groups trying to get coverage for their pet projects (Question 20). Of the editors responding, 95.5% of the non-daily editors and 77.8% of the daily editors said they sometimes feel manipulated by people trying to get into the newspaper. They seem, however, to accept that a newspaper should be used by all groups in a community to air their problems with the system. Nearly half (47.7%) of the non-daily editors and 54% of the daily editors agree or tend to agree with that statement in Question 21.

Both daily and non-daily editors appear willing to invest some staff time in checking out charges, according

to the survey responses. When asked in Question 8 whether they would ignore a letter making unsubstantiated charges, 38.1% of the daily editors and 25.4% of the non-daily editors disagreed or tended to disagree. Responses to Question 9, which asked whether the editor would usually assign a reporter to investigate the letter and its unsubstantiated charges, indicate that 72.6% of the daily editors and 69.7% of the non-daily editors agreed or tended to agree that they would be willing to assign a reporter to check into the charges and print something only if the reporter found a story.

To determine whether editors feel responsible for the effects of their newspapers' reports on social protest, they were asked to respond to four questions. Question 15 measured whether the editors feel obligated to run a story reporting that charges made by protesters and reported in a previous story were false. Among the daily editors, 100% agreed or tended to agree that a second story would be required. The non-daily editors appear slightly less adamant--98.5% agreed or tended to agree that a second story would be required. One non-daily editor neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

If the charges the newspaper printed against the agency weren't incorrect but could not be substantiated later, the editors appear to feel somewhat less of an obligation to run a second story. The responses to Question 16

indicate that 85.5% of the daily editors and 81.5% of the non-daily editors agreed or tended to agree that a follow-up story is in order to explain that the charges were not supported or refuted.

Finally, the editors, based on their responses to Questions 18 and 19, appear to accept that merely reporting on protests can lend status to the protest, although it doesn't necessarily legitimize it. Nearly 70% of the daily editors and 76.1% of the non-daily editors agreed or tended to agree with Question 19, which stated "Newspaper coverage confers a certain status to protest groups." They disagree, however, on whether that newspaper coverage makes the public believe the protest is legitimate (Question 18). Among the daily editors, 47.6% reported that coverage can legitimize the protest in the eyes of the public. The reaction was slightly stronger from the non-daily editors, with 49.2% saying that their coverage can make the protest appear legitimate.

Table 3
Comparison of daily and non-daily responses
in percentages to survey questions *

		Daily	Non-daily
1. Newspaper has policy to guide staff in deciding whether to cover demonstrations.	Y	14.3	13.4
	N	85.2	82.1
	N/R	<u>3.2</u>	<u>4.5</u>
	Total	100%	100%

For questions 3-22, S/A=Strongly Agree; A=Tend to Agree; N=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; D=Tend to Disagree; S/D=Strongly Disagree.

3. If someone is publicly demonstrating, it's news and we cover it.	S/A	30.2	34.3
	A	58.7	52.2
	N	11.1	11.9
	D	0.0	0.0
	S/D	<u>0.0</u>	<u>1.5</u>
Total	100%	100%	

4. A reporter shouldn't interpret the news and should only report on all sides of a controversy.	S/A	42.9	52.2
	A	31.7	25.4
	N	6.3	14.9
	D	12.7	6.0
	S/D	<u>6.3</u>	<u>1.5</u>
Total	100%	100%	

5. Readers can make up their own minds about truth if we print the charges and the response to the charges.	S/A	38.1	53.7
	A	39.7	31.3
	N	7.9	7.5
	D	14.3	7.5
	S/D	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
Total	100%	100%	

6. If a protest group has no data or logic to support its claims, we should refuse to cover its protest.	S/A	7.9	16.4
	A	25.4	25.4
	N	22.2	26.9
	D	33.3	19.4
	S/D	<u>11.1</u>	<u>11.9</u>
Total	100%	100%	

7. It's unfair to print unsubstantiated charges made by a few picketers.	S/A	30.2	31.3
	A	41.3	32.8
	N	14.3	17.9
	D	6.3	9.0
	S/D	<u>7.9</u>	<u>9.0</u>
Total	100%	100%	

8. If someone writes us a letter making vague, unsubstantiated charges, we usually ignore it.	S/A	12.7	35.8
	A	33.3	26.9
	N	15.9	11.9
	D	23.8	19.9
	S/D	<u>14.3</u>	<u>7.5</u>
	Total	100%	100%

9. If someone writes a letter, we usually assign a reporter to investigate and print something only if the reporter finds a story.	S/A	36.5	22.4
	A	34.9	46.3
	N	15.9	14.9
	D	6.3	6.0
	S/D	4.8	9.0
	No response		<u>1.5</u>
	Total	100%	100%

A protest is newsworthy if the topic of the protest, even without supporting data, is:

10. a personal grievance	S/A	6.3	4.5
	A	4.8	13.4
	N	38.1	40.3
	D	41.3	25.4
	S/D	<u>9.5</u>	<u>16.4</u>
	Total	100%	100%

11. gender discrimination	S/A	3.2	4.5
	A	4.8	13.4
	N	36.5	22.4
	D	42.9	35.8
	S/D	<u>12.7</u>	<u>23.9</u>
	Total	100%	100%

12. racial discrimination	S/A	3.2	4.5
	A	3.2	13.4
	N	38.1	22.4
	D	44.4	35.8
	S/D	<u>11.1</u>	<u>23.9</u>
	Total	100%	100%

13. age discrimination	S/A	3.2	4.5
	A	3.2	11.9
	N	38.1	23.9
	D	44.4	35.8
	S/D	<u>11.1</u>	<u>23.9</u>
	Total	100%	100%

14. sexual orientation discrimination	S/A	3.2	4.5
	A	3.2	11.9
	N	38.1	22.4
	D	44.4	35.8
	S/D	<u>11.1</u>	<u>25.4</u>
	Total	100%	100%

15. If charges made by the	S/A	95.2	86.6
protesters were printed and	A	4.8	11.9
turn out to be false, we	N	0.0	1.5
should run a story	D	0.0	0.0
reporting that.	S/D	<u>0.0</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	Total	100%	100%

16. If the charges we	S/A	63.5	64.2
printed cannot be	A	20.6	14.9
substantiated or	N	4.8	10.4
refuted, we should run	D	6.3	3.0
a story explaining that.	S/D	<u>3.2</u>	<u>3.0</u>
	Total	100%	100%

17. My newspaper doesn't	S/A	7.9	19.4
have the staff or money to	A	12.7	23.9
investigate charges made by	N	25.4	20.9
protest groups; the best we	D	28.6	13.4
can do is report them and	S/D	<u>25.4</u>	<u>1.5</u>
let the public decide.	Total	100%	100%

18. Newspaper coverage of a	S/A	12.7	16.4
protest doesn't make people	A	17.5	20.9
believe the protest is	N	22.2	13.4
legitimate.	D	33.3	38.8
	S/D	<u>14.3</u>	<u>10.4</u>
	Total	100%	100%

19. Coverage confers	S/A	20.6	25.4
a certain status to protest	A	49.2	50.7
groups.	N	19.0	9.0
	D	7.9	9.0
	S/D	<u>3.2</u>	<u>6.0</u>
	Total	100%	100%

20. I sometimes feel	S/A	42.9	55.2
manipulated by groups	A	34.9	40.3
trying to get coverage	N	11.1	1.5
for their pet projects.	D	4.8	1.5
	S/D	<u>6.3</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	Total	100%	100%

21. A newspaper should be	S/A	27.0	14.9
used by all groups in a	A	27.0	31.3
community to air their	N	31.7	26.9
problems with the system.	D	6.3	16.4
	S/D	<u>7.9</u>	<u>7.5</u>
	Total	100%	100%

22. If I thought someone was just trying to build a name for himself, I would not cover his demonstration.	S/A	11.1	28.4
	A	42.9	41.8
	N	30.2	16.4
	D	11.1	10.4
	S/D	4.8	3.0
	Total	100%	100%

23. Coverage often includes only the event because:

Charges were so vague they could not be investigated		49.2	41.8
No staff member available to investigate		31.7	53.7
Targets of protest declined to comment on the charges		47.6	20.9

Protest was staged so close to deadline that staff:

Had time to get only charges from protesters		20.6	22.4
Could not contact target of protest		19.0	16.4

(Percentages in Question 23 do not add to 100 because editors were permitted multiple responses)

For Question 24, A=Front page story and photo; B=Front page story only; C=Front page photo only; D=Inside page story and/or photo; E=Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate; F=Multiple responses.

24. What coverage should your newspaper allot a protest:

a. if it is made in a phone call or someone visits the newsroom?	A	1.6	0
	B	1.6	0
	C	0	0
	D	0	1.5
	E	81.0	85.1
	F	1.6	3.0
	No response	14.3	10.4
	Total	100%	100%

b. if it is made in a letter to a reporter?	A	1.6	0
	B	1.6	0
	C	0	0
	D	0	0
	E	81.0	88.1
	F	1.6	3.0
	No response	14.3	9.0
	Total	100%	100%

c. if one person protests with a sign at the agency?	A	3.2	1.5
	B	1.6	0
	C	1.6	0
	D	4.8	11.9
	E	74.6	68.7
	F	0.0	9.0
	No response	<u>14.3</u>	<u>9.0</u>
Total	100.0	100.0	

d. three people	A	3.2	3.0
	B	1.6	0.0
	C	4.8	0.0
	D	4.8	20.9
	E	69.8	56.7
	F	0.0	10.4
	No response	<u>15.9</u>	<u>9.0</u>
Total	100%	100%	

e. 10 people?	A	12.7	10.4
	B	0.0	1.5
	C	3.2	4.5
	D	6.3	26.9
	E	54.0	35.8
	F	4.8	11.9
	No response	<u>19.0</u>	<u>9.0</u>
Total	100%	100%	

f. 30 people?	A	23.8	31.3
	B	0.0	3.0
	C	0.0	6.0
	D	11.1	13.4
	E	31.7	22.4
	F	14.3	13.4
	No response	<u>19.0</u>	<u>10.4</u>
Total	100%	100%	

g. 300 people?	A	47.6	58.2
	B	0.0	3.0
	C	1.6	0.0
	D	3.2	1.5
	E	17.5	19.4
	F	11.1	13.4
	No response	<u>19.0</u>	<u>10.4</u>
Total	100%	100%	

* For each question, 63 daily editors responded and 67 non-daily editors responded.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Were the NAACP and CORR protests discussed earlier a sign of legitimate news or were they, as Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien recognize, an opportunity for the media to be accused of sensationalizing, blowing things out of proportion, covering up, and not paying attention to all sides (cited in Graber, 1990)? Based on comments some editors made in this study, protest demonstrations pose a real dilemma for editors. In some quarters, the media are recognized as playing a vital role in a democratic society (Hertog and McLeod, 1995). On the other hand, the media are often accused of supporting the status quo, and the results of this survey appear to reinforce that interpretation.

Wolfsfeld (1984) writes that protesters and journalists practice a symbiotic relationship, and each "attempts to tip the media-source power balance in order to dominate the process of exchange. Whereas protest leaders are primarily interested in persuasion, the press is more interested in sensation" (p. 551). The majority of the editors who responded to this survey appear to disagree with Wolfsfeld, however, and also disagree on how they decide where--or whether--to publish reports of public protests. Based on their comments, we could conclude that

they want to report on the activities in their communities, but at the same time, want to avoid presenting a false impression of the legitimacy of the protest.

Over and over, the editors say decisions on coverage of protest depend on several factors--including the visibility and validity of the protest group, the agency targeted, the topic of the protest, and what else is on the news budget for the day. Some say they would decide cautiously and, when in doubt, not print the story. Although 54% of the daily editors and 46.2% of the non-daily editors agree with Question 21 of the survey that a newspaper should be used by all groups in a community to air their problems with the system, the comments which some editors provided show a reluctance to give the protest groups a voice in the newspaper.

The editor of a non-daily newspaper with a circulation of 4,200 says that the paper usually would not cover a protest "rather than risk giving them credence." Another, the editor of a non-daily with a circulation of 2,560, is equally as blunt: "We try not to encourage them by coverage." The editor of a daily newspaper with a circulation of 339,000 says, "We cover protests only when both or 'all' sides of the issue can be reached for comment and play it modestly unless the turnout is substantial (in the hundreds of thousands)." Others are equally cautious, and some non-daily editors say they would take

advantage of the extra time they have, as opposed to editors working for a daily newspaper, to spend more time checking on the issue that spurred the protest. "Sometimes we delay a week and get info if (there were) no public displays or demonstration," says the editor of a non-daily with a circulation of 8,400. Others agree. "As a weekly newspaper, we are very careful--errors, retractions, clarifications which must wait a week are too often futile. After a week believing misinformation, people too often ignore the truth," says the editor of a non-daily, circulation 3,200.

One, however, is less cautious. The editor of a non-daily with a circulation of 5,000 would have no qualms in deciding to play a protest in that community on the front page regardless of the size or scope of the demonstration, stating, "All local news is front page."

From the comments, we can conclude that much of the decision-making about coverage depends on the traditional elements of what makes something news: proximity, timeliness, importance, prominence, and oddity (Fedler 1993). For a community newspaper, the proximity criterion could be fulfilled by a protest in that community--even a protest with few participants. Timeliness could easily be met, as well, if we consider that the morning or afternoon edition of the newspaper is expected to include reports of what happened in that community in the past

24 hours. The importance and prominence of a protest could be judged by the number of protesters or, perhaps, by the subject of the protest. Finally, oddity could be simply the unusual sight of people picketing in front of a government agency. Some editors admit that numbers alone could be a deciding factor in whether to run a story.

". . . I believe coverage should take place only if charges are legitimate. However, I know there will be times that I would send a reporter to take a picture of a large crowd. You would tend to believe that the more people upset over the issue, the more likely you will have legitimate reasons for a protest--however, I also know crowds can be lied to and led around by the nose. It's a tough call! . . . I would hope I would not be manipulated into a story based on falsehoods just because there was a crowd," said the editor of a non-daily with a circulation of 2,800.

One editor offered a simple guiding principle when deciding whether to cover protest: "If it happens and we can get there, we cover it" (3,100 non-daily). Others seem to want to temper coverage with caution and consider the traditional elements of news. "We take each incident as it comes up and on its own merits and if staff is available. We don't have many protests . . . but we have a lot of concerns expressed by citizens about government procedures. Some are valid, some are not. We try to look at all sides before we print anything" (3,461 non-daily).

Finally, the editors responding to this survey appear to reinforce their reliance on their reporters'--and their own--sense of what is news and what is not. The editor of a non-daily newspaper with an undisclosed circulation admitted no experience with covering protests but offered a word of advice, complete with a caveat about the effects of competition: "Weekly editors know their towns and know who the phonies are (but) TV cameras are always looking for visuals, which can force us to cover when we might not."

Recommendations

This study established the dilemma faced by editors who must decide on coverage of social protest in their communities. It provided editors a forum for recording their apparent lack of direction in decision-making. More questions, however, remain to be answered.

Several researchers have addressed the question of types of coverage allotted to protesters, including content analyses of various media (Hertog and McLeod, 1995), effects of competition on coverage (Sylvie, 1989), causes of protest (Martindale, 1985), and other factors which might affect coverage. Few, however, appear to address the decision-making involved in determining coverage. Perhaps a study of the newsrooms involved in coverage of protest would give a clearer view of the determinants and an answer to the questions raised by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien

about the justification for coverage or the lack of coverage.

If, as Lambeth (1986) argues, journalists cannot cloak themselves in objectivity to support the way social protests are reported and if, as Strentz (1989) points out, consequences of reporting should be considered a weak justification for how journalists report, perhaps we should consider an in-depth look at how the editors--who are responsible for how their reporters collect information and how their newspapers present those reports--decide how or if those reports are presented.

Apparently, the concept of objectivity--a non-biased recital of facts--has lost its allure as a defense in reporting. In its proposed revision to its code of ethics, the Society of Professional Journalists (1995) has dropped objectivity as a goal, and appears to have realigned its priorities. In the 1987 revision of its code of ethics (Black, 1993), the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) stated that "the public's right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media" (p. 4). Accuracy and objectivity were the fourth items on the society's list of responsibilities.

In 1995, however, the SPJ lists truth as the first of its principles and standards for professionalism, and objectivity is not mentioned at all. Indeed, the journalist's responsibility to do more than merely report

what happens or is said is clearly stated in the proposed code (1995):

Truthfulness means "getting it right." Truth-telling and accuracy are absolute requirements. Therefore journalists must: 1(a) Test the accuracy, whenever reasonable or possible, of information from all sources. Recognize that many sources may provide self-serving and misleading information (p. 29).

The SPJ also appears to be addressing the criticism cited in this study that the media tend to support the status quo. In Part II of the proposed code, the SPJ (1995) cites comprehensiveness as a principle and standard of professionalism, advising journalists to "report on all significant aspects of global society, including its constituent groups. We need to tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so" (p. 29). To do this, journalists are advised to "(s)trive to give voice to all segments of society in public discourse" (p. 29). Presumably, those segments would include protest groups, but coverage of those groups would, by the proposed SPJ code (1995), include testing the accuracy of the groups' claims.

Future research could test acceptance and adherence to this proposed code, if it is adopted, by presenting statistical analysis paired with follow-up questions with

responding editors. Previous studies tell us how protest is treated. Perhaps future studies will discuss why the protest was treated as it was and whether the coverage has evolved from event-only reporting.

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APPENDIX A

AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY
 CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
 (MUST BE TYPEWRITTEN)

TITLE Responsible Reporting of Social Protest

FUNDING SOURCE None

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Patricia Ferrier

DEPARTMENT Speech, Communication and Theatre

SPONSOR (If student research) Dr. Ellen Kanervo

1. Give a brief description or outline of your research procedures as they relate to the use of human subjects. This should include a description of the subjects themselves, instructions given to them, activities in which they engage, special incentives, and tests and questionnaires. If new or non-standard tests or questionnaires are used, copies should be attached to this form. Make notation if the subjects are minors or "vulnerable" (i.e. children, prisoners, mentally or physically infirm, etc.)

The human subjects will be 300 editors of daily newspapers and 300 editors of non-daily newspapers. They will be asked to complete a survey of questions related to publishing reports of social protest in their communities. A copy of the surveys is included.

2. Does this research entail possible risk of psychological, legal, physical, or social harm to the subjects? Please explain. What steps have been taken to minimize these risks? What provisions have been made to ensure that appropriate facilities and professional attention necessary for the health and safety of the subjects are available and will be utilized?

No risk is involved in this research.

3. The potential benefits of the activity to the subjects and to mankind in general outweigh any possible risks. This opinion is justified by the following reasons:

No possible risks are involved in this research.

4. Will legally effective, informed consent be obtained from all subjects or their legally authorized representative?

Yes, please see attached letter to be sent with survey.

5. Will the confidentiality/anonymity of all subjects be maintained? How is this accomplished? (If not, has a formal release been obtained? Attach.) (A) If data will be stored by electronic media, what steps will be taken to assure confidentiality/anonymity? (B) If data will be stored by nonelectronic media, what steps will be taken to assure confidentiality/anonymity?

Please see attached letter.

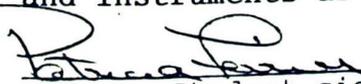
6. Do the data to be collected relate to illegal activities? If yes, explain.

No.

7. Are all subjects protected from future potentially harmful use of the data collected in this investigation? How is this accomplished?

I foresee no future potentially harmful use of the data.

I have read the Austin Peay State University Policies and Procedures on Human Research and agree to abide by them. I also agree to report to the Human Research Review Committee any significant and relevant changes in procedures and instruments as they relate to subjects.

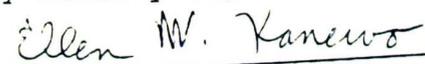


Student signature

26 September 1994

Date

Student research directed by faculty should be co-signed by faculty supervisor.



Faculty signature

October 17, 1994

Dear Colleague:

For a master of arts degree in communication, I am studying a dilemma I face as the city editor for a community newspaper: protest groups which plan public demonstrations. If their claims are valid, they could point out important changes that need to be made, but sometimes the group's claims are not supported by evidence. What is a newspaper's responsibility when reporting on these groups?

I am sending this survey to editors of daily and weekly newspapers to see how my colleagues cover social protest. The questionnaire takes about 10 minutes to answer, and if my study is to be valid, I need as many responses as possible. If possible, I would appreciate your answer by Oct. 31. Your responses are confidential, you will not be identified in my report and I am the only one who will see your answers. If you prefer, you may pass this survey along to your city editor or assignment editor to complete.

By returning the completed survey, you are agreeing to participate in this study, which is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ellen Kanervo, professor of journalism and chair of the department of speech, communication and theater at APSU. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have about this study, and I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the results if you send me a note separately from the survey form.

Please return the survey to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. You are an important part of this research and I am grateful for your help.

Sincerely,

PATRICIA FERRIER

Survey on Covering Public Protests

Newspaper's circulation: _____

1. My newspaper has a policy to guide the staff in deciding whether to cover public demonstrations. _____ (daily) _____ (Sunday)
 ___ Yes ___ No

2. If you checked "yes," please state the policy briefly or attach a copy.

Here are some statements newspaper editors have made about news coverage of protest groups. Please mark the answer which most closely reflects your professional opinion.

3. If someone is publicly demonstrating against a government agency (city hall, police department, school system, etc.) it's news and we cover it.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

4. A reporter is not supposed to interpret the news and should only report on all sides of a controversy.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

5. Readers can make up their own minds about the truth if we print the charges and the government officials' response to the charges.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

6. If a protest group has no data or logic to support its claim, we should refuse to cover its protest.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

7. It's unfair to our readers and government officials to print vague, unsubstantiated charges made by a few picketers carrying signs.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

8. If someone writes us a letter (not a "letter to the editor") making unsubstantiated charges, we usually ignore it.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

9. If someone writes a letter (not a "letter to the editor") we usually assign a reporter to investigate and print something only if the reporter finds a story.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

10. A protest is newsworthy if someone is protesting a personal grievance against the agency.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
11. A protest is newsworthy if someone is charging gender discrimination even if no supporting data is provided.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
12. A protest is newsworthy if someone is charging racial discrimination even if no supporting data is provided.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
13. A protest is newsworthy if someone is charging age discrimination even if no supporting data is provided.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
14. A protest is newsworthy if someone is charging sexual orientation discrimination even if no supporting data is provided.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
15. If charges made by the protesters against the agency were printed in the newspaper and later turn out to be false, we should run a story reporting that information.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
16. If the charges we printed against the agency cannot be substantiated or refuted, the newspaper should run a story explaining that the charges were not supported or refuted.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
17. My newspaper doesn't have the staff or the money to investigate charges made by protest groups; the best we can do is report them and let the public decide.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree
18. Newspaper coverage of a protest doesn't make the public believe the protest is legitimate.
 ___ Agree ___ Tend to agree ___ Neither agree nor disagree ___ Tend to disagree ___ Disagree

19. Newspaper coverage confers a certain status to protest groups.
 Agree Tend to agree Neither agree nor disagree
 disagree Tend to disagree Disagree
20. I sometimes feel manipulated by groups trying to get coverage for their pet projects.
 Agree Tend to agree Neither agree nor disagree
 disagree Tend to disagree Disagree
21. A newspaper should be used by all groups in a community to air their problems with the system.
 Agree Tend to agree Neither agree nor disagree
 disagree Tend to disagree Disagree
22. If I thought someone was just trying to build a name for himself, I would not cover his demonstration.
 Agree Tend to agree Neither agree nor disagree
 disagree Tend to disagree Disagree
23. Coverage often includes only the event because (please check as many responses as apply):
 Charges were so vague they could not be investigated (for example, protesters declined to provide names, dates, places of specific instances being protested).
 No staff member available to investigate
 Targets of protest declined to comment on the charges
 Protest was so close to deadline that staff:
 Had time to get only charges from the protesters
 Could not contact target of protest
24. What coverage should your newspaper allot to a protest:
 a. if it is made in a phone call to a reporter or if someone comes to the newsroom with the information?
 Front page story and photo
 Front page story only
 Front page photo only
 Inside page story and/or photo
 Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate
 b. if it is made in a letter to a reporter?
 Front page story and photo
 Front page story only
 Front page photo only
 Inside page story and/or photo
 Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate

- c. if one person demonstrates with a sign in front of the government agency being targeted?
- Front page story and photo
 - Front page story only
 - Front page photo only
 - Inside page story and/or photo
 - Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate
- d. if three people demonstrate with signs?
- Front page story and photo
 - Front page story only
 - Front page photo only
 - Inside page story and/or photo
 - Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate
- e. if 10 people demonstrate with signs?
- Front page story and photo
 - Front page story only
 - Front page photo only
 - Inside page story and/or photo
 - Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate
- f. if 30 people demonstrate with signs?
- Front page story and photo
 - Front page story only
 - Front page photo only
 - Inside page story and/or photo
 - Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate
- g. if 300 people demonstrate with signs?
- Front page story and photo
 - Front page story only
 - Front page photo only
 - Inside page story and/or photo
 - Coverage only if reporter investigates and believes the protest is legitimate

Thank you again for your time and your help. If you would like to add comments to any of the questions or share your experiences more thoroughly, I would welcome them. I deeply appreciate your efforts in supporting my study of the newspaper's role in reporting social protest. If you would like a report of the results of this survey, please send me a note and I'll be happy to mail the outcome of the study.

Survey on Covering Public Protests

Newspaper's circulation: _____

1. My newspaper has a policy to guide the staff in deciding whether to cover public demonstrations.
 Yes No
2. If you checked "yes," please state the policy briefly or attach a copy.

Here are some statements newspaper editors have made about news coverage of protest groups. Please mark the answer which most closely reflects your professional opinion.

3. If someone is publicly demonstrating against a government agency (city hall, police department, school system, etc.) it's news and we cover it.
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APPENDIX B

Appendix B

Part A (Editors' comments to survey questions.)

Question

No. 2 (This question asked editors to state their newspaper's policy on how to decide whether to cover public demonstrations)

"Is it newsworthy and are we being used?" (no circulation given)

"Simply: each is judged on individual merit" (3,200 non-daily)

"We investigate to determine whether there is legitimate reason for protest. If so, we cover it with story and/or photo." (25,500 daily)

"Must be newsworthy, speak to issues" (1,400 non-daily)

"Case by case decision from publisher" (6,500 non-daily)

"Reporters contact editor. If demonstration regarding public issue, we cover both sides." (8,400 daily)

"Legitimate complaint or sour grapes?" (23,000 non-daily)

"We try not to encourage them by coverage" (2,560 non-daily)

"We decide the merit and the strengths of each demonstration" (19,000 daily)

"Cover the news" (38,000 daily)

"Is it newsworthy?" (21,500 daily)

"We cover protests only when both or 'all' sides of the issue can be reached for comment and play it modestly unless the turnout is substantial (in the hundreds or thousands)." (339,000 daily)

"Check with editor" (12,000 daily)

"We cover them and get responses from other side.

Amount of coverage depends on validity of issue."
(15,000 daily)

No. 3 (If someone is publicly demonstrating against a government agency . . . it's news and we cover it.)

"Depends on the topic and the number of protesters."
(124,000 daily)

No. 4 (A reporter is not supposed to interpret the news and should only report on all sides of a controversy.)

"This is virtually impossible, but worth the effort."
(3,200 non-daily)

No. 5 (Readers can make up their own minds about the truth if we print the charges and the government officials' response to the charges.)

"Need to find fact" (43,000 daily)

"True to a degree, but we also should determine, if possible, the truth." (124,000 daily)

No. 6 (If a protest group has no data or logic to support its claim, we should refuse to cover its protest.)

"We should check into it ourselves" (17,250 daily)

No. 7 (It's unfair to our readers and government officials to print vague, unsubstantiated charges made by a few picketers carrying signs.)

"The charges should be reported with response to eliminate rumors" (10,000 non-daily)

No. 8 (If someone writes us a letter . . . making unsubstantiated charges, we usually ignore it.)

"It is usually worth a phone call to check, depending on seriousness of charge" (10,000 non-daily)

"This becomes a tough call. Do you ignore the protest or do you cover it and check out the charges? I think you do both." (7,700 daily)

"We check and see whether the charge is valid" (19,400 non-daily)

"We have an obligation to check it out with sources." (124,000 daily)

No. 10 (A protest is newsworthy if someone is protesting a personal grievance against the agency.)

"If it goes to court, then it's newsworthy" (10,000 non-daily)

"It depends" (43,000 daily)

No. 11, 12, 13, 14 (A protest is newsworthy if someone is charging, respectively, gender, racial, age, discrimination even if no supporting data is provided.)

"Formal charges substantiate. Might be worth a look" (10,000 non-daily)

"All need more investigation" (17,250 daily)

"A charge doesn't make it a story, but we have an obligation to check out charges for legitimacy." (7,700 daily)

"Supporting data is important." (124,000 daily)

"It might be worth looking into" (10,000 non-daily)

No. 16 (If the charges we printed against the agency cannot be substantiated or refuted, the newspaper should run a story explaining that the charges were not supported or refuted.)

"Story wouldn't have run in this paper" (4,600 non-daily)

"Depends on the charges." (124,000 daily)

No. 17 (My newspaper doesn't have the staff or the money to investigate charges made by protest groups; the best we can do is report them and let the public decide.)

"We usually don't cover them rather than risk giving credence" (3,200 non-daily)

"If a newspaper can't make a commitment to check it out, it shouldn't run the story at all." (124,000 daily)

No. 18 (Newspaper coverage of a protest doesn't make the public believe the protest is legitimate.)

"Unfortunately, sometimes it does legitimize it" (7,700 daily)

No. 21 (A newspaper should be used by all groups in a community to air their problems with the system)

"Newspaper should inform and not just be a propaganda machine" (10,000 non-daily)

No. 22 (If I thought someone was just trying to build a name for himself, I would not cover his demonstration.)

"Understanding motivation is key. So are the allegations." (124,000 daily)

No. 24 a, b, c, d, e, f, and g (What coverage should your newspaper allot to a protest if it is, respectively, made in a phone call to a reporter or if someone comes to the newsroom with the information; if it is made in a letter to a reporter; if one person demonstrates with a sign in front of the government agency being targeted; if three people demonstrate with signs; if 10 people demonstrate with signs; if 30 people demonstrate with signs; if 300 people demonstrate with signs?)

"Where I place a story in the paper depends more on the issue than on how we initially heard about it." (4,000 non-daily).

"Depends on the situation. Depends on the specific incident" (16,000 daily)

"Content drives position and how it is delivered" (10,000 non-daily). (Researcher's note: But for g (300 people), the editor checks 1 and 5 as "most likely because this would constitute one of the largest stories that week.")

"Every protest is treated separately" (70,000 daily)

"Depends. No blanket rule for coverage" (17,250 daily)

"It's hard to evaluate importance of story only from number of people" (7,500 daily)

"Depends on the topic. Each case handled separately" (Researcher's note: This editor indicated the story would run on the front page if 300 people participated in the protest.) (43,000 daily)

"Decisions based on more than just a cause" (33,000 daily)

"Depends on the newsworthiness of the specific claim, substantiation, etc. The more protesters, the greater play" (8,000 daily)

"Would depend on agency, charges and what else was in news budget" (2,500 daily)

"The amount and type of coverage will always be dependent on reporter investigation results unless the number of protesters renders it newsworthy in itself. Then the angle of the story will be dependent on investigation" (6,500 daily)

"Depends on visibility, validity, etc." (105,000 daily)

"Usually photo and short explanation of protest" (3,200 non-daily) (Researcher's note: Editor selected 'Inside page story and photo')

"Maybe front" (23,000 daily)

"Could be all or none" (45,000 daily)

"Depends on events of day." (30,000 daily)

"If it happens and we can get there, we cover it"

(3,100 non-daily)

"We take each incident as it comes up and on its own merit and if staff is available. We don't have many protests as walking on the street, but we have a lot of concerns expressed by citizens about government procedures. Some are valid, some are not. We try to look at all sides before we print anything" (3,461 non-daily)

"News coverage depends on merits of protest, size and is reviewed on case-by-case basis." (4,600 non-daily)

"All local news is front page" (5,000 non-daily)

"Obviously from my answers of 24a-g, I believe coverage should take place only if charges are legitimate. However, I know there will be times that I would send a reporter to take a picture of a large crowd. You would tend to believe that the more people upset over the issue, the more likely you will have legitimate reasons for a protest -- however, I also know crowds can be lied to and led around by the nose. It's a tough call! I'm not perfect. I would hope I would not be manipulated into a story based on falsehoods just because there was a crowd." (2,800 non-daily)

"We try to cover all the bases and decide after live coverage whether or not the issue is worth a story" (19,400 non-daily)

"Newsworthiness does become a function of numbers

at some point, but play still must be determined by other characteristics of the protest -- not numbers alone"
(162,000 daily)

Part B: General comments from editors

"Balanced reporting is the key. Both sides should be given an opportunity to present their case. In community newspapers, it doesn't matter where the lead comes from. It matters what the information is at the end of that lead."
(10,000 non-daily)

"A lot depends on the situation -- each is handled individually. On certain issues, the same groups protest time after time, but no new info is presented. Why cover it again?" (1,600 non-daily)

"We do not cover hate groups -- it's a lose-lose situation. As a weekly newspaper, we are very careful -- errors, retractions, clarifications which must "wait" a week are too often "futile" -- after a week believing misinformation, people too often ignore truth" (3,200 non-daily)

"Some of these protests are by NUTS who worry us to gain the spotlight. I don't believe we should worry our readers with the rantings of kooks. We cover legitimate protests." (5,000 non-daily)

"Cutbacks in staffing and editorial budgets in recent times severely restrict our ability to do investigative

reporting properly at small dailies" (14,000 daily)

"We are a weekly. Sometimes we delay a week and get info if no public displays or demonstration" (8,400 non-daily)

"This is a difficult area. In general, we believe we must always get balance to the story of a protest. We have become more vigilant about choosing whether to report all protests. Sometimes we do not." (27,000 daily)

"Protests here are as rare as Democrats. My answers are to hypothetical situations, not what actually happened. In practice, we'd play each situation by ear. Weekly editors know their towns and know who the phonies are. TV is an influence. TV cameras are always looking for visuals, which can force us to cover when we might not." (non-daily newspaper, no circulation given)