Media Bias: How Much Does it Hurt or Help the Media-Public Relationship?

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# Abstract

The focus of this research paper is to qualify the relationship between the public and the Media and to discover how much Media bias, or the *perception* of Media bias affects that relationship. An important angle taken in this study is the question of whether or not bias on the part of the Media actually helps the public when forming educated opinions.

The review of existing literature on Media bias and public perception of the Media and the collection of data via interviews with expert, professional journalists have led to two conclusions about the Media-public relationship: (1) in order for the relationship to function well, there must be an "authentic trust" between the two parties – a trust that accepts the possibility of misinformation or bad reporting (Flores and Solomon 1998); and (2) the relationship must also be mutually-beneficial.

The major harbinger to the mutually beneficial relationship is the *Uses and Gratification Theory* – which means that the public only consumes what reaffirms their own biases and opinions. This is part of the growing phenomenon of non-Media members becoming their own journalists, thanks to the growing technology industry.

All of the interviews conducted in this study found the respondents agreed on this: the Media ought to explain its mistakes, especially apparent biases in their reporting. The conclusion is that Media bias, when apparent and carefully pointed out by the Media, can benefit the public in that it aids the formulation of original opinions in the head of the consumer.

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# Chapter 1

*Introduction*

**Statement of the Problem**

This study addresses the relationship between News Media and the public. In recent years, the public has become more disconnected to reporters and journalists: "A large percentage of the public believes that the news media are biased, and the majority of these individuals consider the direction of the bias to be against their own viewpoints" (Eveland, Shah 2003).

This schism between the two necessary components of one of democracy's most important relationships is clear in the broadcast world of today, but little research has been done to examine the benefits, if any, of partisanship and bias on the part of the News Media.

**Background of the Problem**

The existing literature concerning the Media-public relationship covers the prevalence of Media biases, the public's disapproval of Media partisanship and how trust can be fostered between the two entities.

Much of the attitude toward the Media in the existing literature is that of objection toward the News' *perceived* bias, but this objection is often rooted in personal partisanship on the side of the *consumer*. Much of the disdain toward the Media today is due to "the tendency of people with divergent prior opinions" (Ladd 2009), otherwise known as the "Hostile Media Phenomenon."

It is imperative for research to be done on this phenomenon to discover where the bias in the Media-public relationship lies, and more importantly, if the partisanship in the Media is beneficial to citizens when forming their own informed opinions.

**Purpose of the Study**

In an age of increasing technology on which to view News Media and the dominance of various social media outlets, the average member of the public can be his or her own journalist. The public no longer looks to the reporter for the totality of information; in fact the journalist has become the epitome of the term *take with a grain of salt*, at least in the eyes of the audience.

By investigating the modern-day journalist through shadowing and interviewing three Media professionals, this study will portray the Media-public relationship through the perspective of the *perceived* biased Media member. Having an in-depth inquiry into the life of the reporter (whose goal is to be as objective as possible) could help *humanize* the Media – removing the distrust from the public's eye.

**Setting for the Study**

This study will be done as part of the data collection for a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. Interviews will be conducted with three professional reporters and journalists. Each interviewee will be shadowed while they are on the job as a journalist or reporter; each will be asked the same questions and probes. The questionnaire is geared specifically toward answering

the research questions and to help fill any holes in previous literature on the topic of News Media Bias

**Research Questions**

This study used the following research questions that were formatted to answer holes in the literature on the topic of Media bias and the public perception of such.  Each question was created after exploring the information in the literature in order to gain pertinent and imperative data from professionals in the field of News Media.

1. Does the public trust the Media?

2. How does this trust between the Media and the public get made?

3. Are reporters and journalists untrustworthy?

4. What are the consequences for distrusting the Media?

5. Is having an agenda part of being a journalist?

6. Do Media agencies help the public shape their opinions?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for clarification and to assist the reader by providing context to the remainder of the study.

Authentic Trust:  The form f trust that "does not exclude or deny distrust but rather accepts it… overcomes it" (Flores and Solomon, 1998, p. 213).

Hostile Media Phenomenon: The tendency of people to hold personal biases or opinions when assessing the information given through the Media (Ladd, 2009, p. 577).

Uses and Gratification Theory: "The main objective of uses and gratification theory is to explain the psychological needs that shape why people use the media and that motivate them to engage in certain media-use behaviors for gratifications that fulfill those intrinsic needs" (Ko, Cho, and Roberts, 2005, p. 58)

**Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 contains the background of the problem, purpose of the study and a definition of terms.  Chapter 2 will use the literature to identify the state of the relationship between the public and the Media.

# Chapter 2

*Literature Review*

The review of literature focuses on the existing literature on the public's perception of the Media, the existence of Media bias and the benefits or consequences of distrusting the Media.

**Existence of Trust Between the Media and the Public**

Ladd (2009) and Feldman (2011) both agree upon the existence of the "Hostile Media Phenomenon". Ladd (2009) defines the phenomenon as "the tendency of people with divergent prior opinions" (p. 577). Feldman's definition is similar in that it characterizes the phenomenon as the public being "hostile to their own position" (p. 418).

Both accounts of the "Hostile Media Phenomenon" flirt with the "Uses and Gratification Theory" – a theory suggesting the public gravitates toward media that have the same or a similar bias to their own; the public is gratified when a news outlet reaffirms their opinions and beliefs.

Feldman writes that people tend to be distrusting of the Media by default, "particularly perceptions of the host" (p. 407). In other words, the audience makes up its mind on the credibility of the source depending on who is presenting it. It's an exercise of ad-hominem nature – discrediting the information being given because it comes from a journalist or pundit whose biases differ from the listener's.

Ladd believes this predisposition from the audience is due to its "increasingly well-documented role of source credibility" (p. 573). Ladd suggests that the everyday

person is becoming his or her own fact-checker, and therefore his or her own *journalist*. Being one's own journalist is the foundation for predisposed beliefs about current issues and events, making it quite probable that most journalists have accounts of these same issues and events that different from the listener's. The disparity here establishes "attitudes [that] may have important consequences for… decision-making" (Ladd p. 573).

Being unable to decide which media source to believe (because of the confusion brought about by self-reporting) leads to a feeling that all Media contradicts itself, making all journalism seem untrustworthy.

The "Hostile Media Phenomenon" is the largest argument the authors give to explain the feeling the public has for the Media. The "Hostile Media Phenomenon" stems from a source of predisposition brought about by the public's belief that they can act as there own journalists, which creates a natural disdain toward potential Media with conflicting opinions – thus a feeling of distrust.

**Creating Trust in the Media-Public Relationship**

According to Flores and Solomon (1998) the conception of a trusting relationship begins when both parties forgo the desire for power and control: "Trust entails lack of control, in that some power is transferred or given up to the person who is trusted" (p. 206).

This submission of control can be treacherous, though. As Moehler and Singh (2011) point out, believing large media agencies often lead the gullible public down a path of misinformation and partisanship; a path made thorny by what Flores and Solomon would call a "blind trust, trust without warrant, foolish trust" (p. 206).

Flores and Solomon define trust as a way of *well-being*, where the instances of distrust cause only disharmony and alienation. Alienation in a relationship (such as the one between the Media and the public) breeds disdain toward one side of the bond. This disdain will cause a blinded view of the opposing party's actions – fewer mistakes are accepted and only the highest form of flawlessness will be allowed.

Trust cannot be created when one party has disdain toward the other and holds such a tight leash around the other's throat. As Barbalet (2009) points out:

"Most treatments define trust in terms of a confident expectation regarding another's behavior. We shall see that this covers only half of its mechanism as it leaves out the essential component of a self-referential confidence in the subject's own judgment (p. 368).

In other words, the onus is on both the Media *and* the public to find a common medium – one without control on either side.

Much of the literature regarding trust in the Media world describes reporters and pundits as suppliers of whatever the public hopes to hear. The reality of a trusting relationship is that each side accepts what the other has to say, but uses his or her own judgment to dig up the truth that works on his or her side. Flores and Solomon (1998) characterize this use of self-reference when dissecting the Media as the true quality of "authentic trust" that "does not exclude or deny distrust but rather accepts it… overcomes it" (213).

The authors claim that so much of trust begins with the acceptance of the possibility for misinformation. In order for a person of the public to *authentically* trust the Media, he or she has to have a self-referential attitude toward the reporter's words –

accept that there is a possibility for misinformation, but also take the responsibility to inform one's self as insurance. In turn, that insurance turns into a mutually beneficial relationship between the Media and the public, where each side holds the other accountable while also forgoing the reigns of power that would otherwise cause disdain.

Once both the acceptance of the occasional misinformation and the rejection of control over the other party take place, people of the public can conceive *authentic* trust.


**Trusting Journalists**

Feldman (2011) characterizes the way in which the public trusts the media on a type of spectrum, quantifying how much "selective perception" is taking place amongst partisan viewers of the Media (p. 418). The Uses and Gratification Theory can be applied here as well: the public perceives the Media how they wish, satisfying the predisposed notions of their existing partisanship. The farther away a Media outlet's bias is perceived to stray from the viewer's, the more biased that specific Media outlet is perceived to be.

Feldman (2011) narrows his explanation by submitting, "partisan agreement drives just how much bias is perceived in opinionated news" (p. 428). Put simply, an audience member will trust or distrust a journalist based on the degree to which the *opinion*-based news coverage is being presented. If the audience member knows the journalist is coming from a position of opinion (i.e. pundits such as Bill Maher or Rush Limbaugh), then the journalist's words would be met with heightened skepticism.

Ladd (2009) agrees with Feldman's assessment, noticing "More resistance to information about national conditions and other influential campaign news" (p. 573) – uniquely hot topics for partisanship.

It is clear that some of the authors find the public distrusts the Media, but is that position justified?  Niven (2012) is not so sure the Media is to blame for any biased coverage of current issues or events: "large-scale studies of political news coverage suggests no consistent ideological or partisan bias in the American news media" (p. 259).  Thus, there is greater evidence that suggests the Uses and Gratification Theory has a place in the distrust that is so evident in the Media-public relationship.


**Consequences for Distrusting the Media**

Distrust exists on both sides of the Media-public relationship.  On one hand, the public often distrusts the media: "there was a strategic value in framing '[the] media as a problem'" (Dunbar-Hester, 2014, p. 555-556).  The public often "frames" the media as the untrustworthy, corporate animal that ought to be struck down.

On the other side, the Media often distrusts its public:

> Most viewers are presumed to be more interested in local news and entertainment than in national news, and to be less knowledgeable about it.  Grabbing the attention of tens of millions of such viewers requires pictures with universal appeal (Zeidenstein, 1983, p. 353).

Barbalet (2009) finds relationships such as the Media-public's as ones in need of trust, and in order for that trust to be had there is an "essentially emotional basis that is foundation to all trust" (p. 374).  But that emotional foundation is delicate because "Trust

requires a positive feeling of expectation regarding another's future actions. But the expectation is not disinterested as the other's future actions will effectively impact on the trust giver's well being" (Barbalet, 2009, p. 375).

There is an expectation involved when engaged in a trusting relationship rooted in emotions. Dunbar-Hester's (2014) paper talks about the fine line between effective Media criticism and detrimental Media criticism. She writes that there is value in taking a stance against the Media in hopes for social change, but "the foundation upon which it rested was not necessarily stable" (p. 556).

The authors agree that distrust between the Media and the public can lead to a troubling tension, but none clarify as to what specifically can occur once the Media and the publics have lost trust in on another.

**The Existence of Agenda in Reporting**

Niven (2012) addresses the question of whether partisanship exists in Media: "Some studies have found people on opposing side of a controversy, viewing identical coverage, with both concluding that the coverage was biased against their position" (p. 874). Bias is perceived constantly throughout the fight between opposing viewpoints; the fight between both sides of the spectrum alone shine slight on the fact that bias is clearly a part of the Media. One side will always choose one over another, or be turned off by one side more than the other – this is a bias.

So it is clear that some partisanship exists in the world of Media, but the literature does not say whether or not bias and partisanship has a "place" in the profession. In other

words, the question still remains: "is bias beneficial in any way to the public when forming its opinion?"

## Media Bias Helping Public Opinion

None of the literature addresses how Media bias can aid the public's opinion. All of the literature regarding the prevalence of bias in the Media suggests the consequences of an untrustworthy relationship between the Media and the public. But none of the authors discuss the potential of a positive Media bias that helps the public formulate educated positions.

# Chapter 3

*Methodology*

This chapter presents the methods used to conduct data collection including the data sources, collection and presentation of the data, and limitations to the data collection process.

**Data Sources**

For this study, three experts from the field of journalism were interviewed based on a single questionnaire. The questionnaire was specifically developed to answer the original research questions regarding the public's perception of the Media and the prevalence of bias when reporting news.

**Participants**

Participants in the study were three experts in the field of journalism and mass Media: Jim Seimas, Assistant Sports Editor at Santa Cruz Sentinel in Scotts Valley, California; Randol White, News Director at KCBX Central Coast Public Radio in San Luis Obispo, California; and Patti Piburn, Assistant Professor of Broadcast Journalism at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo and host of 'Morning Edition' at KCBX Central Coast Public Radio in San Luis Obispo, California.

**Interview Design**

The following questions and probes were asked to each of the experts who served as data sources for the study:

1. How would you, as an expert in your field, describe the relationship between the Media and the public?  Please provide an example during your professional career when this type of relationship was most noticeable?

2. As a member of the Media, do you feel the general public trusts you?  Why or why not?  Please provide examples of when you felt trusted or distrusted by the public.

3. What do you do as a Media member to gain the trust of the public?  What are some specific examples of this in action?

4. What are the consequences of the public distrusting someone like yourself, or the Media in general?  Can you provide any examples of these consequences happening?

5. According to the literature used in this study, much of the distrust toward the Media is rooted in the belief that Media members have biases.  Do you believe that having a bias or agenda is part of being a member of the Media?  Why or why not?

6. Would you say partisanship on the part of the Media could be beneficial to the public?  Does the obvious biases of certain Media organizations actually help the public form their informed and balanced opinions?

**Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected via three interviews with each of the expert respondents.  Each interview was conducted during July 2016.  During the interviews, the respondents were asked questions from a single questionnaire designed to provide

answers to the original research questions while gaining insight into the relationship

members of the Media have with the public they serve.


**Data Presentation**

        The data collected from each interview was documented through an audio

recording device as well as written notes during and after the interviews to help elaborate

or ad context to the responses.  Some interview questions were asked and answered via

email.  This method of data collection ensures that the data presented in this study is as

complete and objective as possible.


**Limitations**

        There are some limitations to this study based on the type of data that was

collected and the interview process.  Since this study was conducted to gain insight into

the journalistic experience of current Media professionals, some limitations may exist

based on the assumption that the respondents' answers are rooted in opinion.

        Additionally, while the interviews with Jim Seimas and Randol White were done

in person, Patti Piburn's interview was conducted via email.  Due to Piburn's location in

Arizona, a face-to-face interview was not feasible.

# Chapter 4

*Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 will provide descriptions of the three experts interviewed for data collection. This chapter will also summarize each of the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. Since the interviews were recorded, the answers will be presented in the form of direct quotations or paraphrased responses. The experts' answers will then be analyzed and compared to the original research questions and the existing literature on the relationship between the Media and the public and the existence of Media bias as reviewed in Chapter 2.

**Description of Participating Experts in Data Collection**

Jim Seimas was the respondent providing the expert opinion reporters' trustworthiness as seen through the eyes of the public. Seimas is a renowned journalist in Santa Cruz County, California having been a local sports reporter or sports editor for over 17 years at the Santa Cruz Sentinel. Seimas has won 19 Associated Press Sports Editors awards that recognize his exceptional writing and reporting skills when it comes to print journalism.

Randol White has been an anchor and reporter for television news, a talk show producer for radio, the Executive Producer of a multi-media company, Eat Drink Explore Media, and the News Director for the National Public Radio station KCBX Central Coast Public Radio. White's experience in mass Media has covered all mediums (television,

web and print) for over two decades.  White has also won First Place Public Radio News

Directors Inc. Award for his excellence in radio broadcasting.

Patti Piburn is an accomplished journalist working as a news anchor and reporter

for KCOY in Santa Maria, California and KKFX in San Luis Obispo, California.  Piburn

is also an Assistant Professor of Broadcast Journalism at California Polytechnic State

University San Luis Obispo.  Her experience is mostly in broadcast news, where she has

expertise in television news and radio, having served as the host of KCBX Central Coast

Public Radio's NPR show, Morning Edition.


**Data Collection Questionnaire**

Each expert was asked to respond to each of the following questions and probes

regarding the relationship between the Media and the public, the public's trust of the

Media and the existence of bias in the Media:

1.  How would you, as an expert in the field describe the relationship between the

    News Media and the public?"

Question #1 was asked to gain insight from the experts in the field of Media as to

what they believe the public feels about people in their position.  Additionally, the

question was asked to get the perspective of what the public looks like to a member of the

Media.  The question was designed to illustrate the foundation of what the Media-public

relationship builds off of each time a new story is published for consumption.

- Jim Seimas: "It seems like so much of… so many sources don't want to get

    burned so they're apprehensive in discussing certain things with

    reporters.  You have to earn trust" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: "Media should be informing the public on issues of the day, in our case community aspects. It should be – it's not in all cases – but it should be a two-way relationship with the public" (Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "The News Media provides information necessary for an informed public, which is key to a democracy. The public consumes the information, as well as give feedback, and contributes ideas, opinions and stories" (Appendix C).

2. As a reporter and journalist, do you feel the public trusts you?

    a. Please provide examples of this trust in action.

Question #2 was asked to make a move away from the theoretical or ideal answer of what the relationship between the Media and the public ought to be. This question was designed to get a unique and honest perspective from a Media member on what he or she thought about their reputation as a journalist.

- Jim Seimas: "I think for the most part the public trusts the Media. As a reporter I trust what I hear on television and read. I would question why people shouldn't" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: "They'll trust more if you're good at what you do and you don't twist things for an agenda" (Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "I do feel trusted by the people in the community where I've worked for more than 10 years as a journalist" (Appendix C).

3. What do you do or what have you done to gain the trust of the public?"

    a. Please provide examples of this in action.

Question #3 was asked to help *humanize* the Media member. Providing examples of Media members making the effort to gain trust of the public might lessen the fear that journalists all have agendas and biases.

- Jim Seimas: "Stuff wears off after a while, but I am never out to try and burn anyone Sometimes you have to do stories that doesn't put people in a good light, but it's newsworthy. So you just have to say it: 'I'm just doing my job'" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: "I believe you need to be in a location for years, a decade like I'm coming up on right now – only now am I starting to feel like I'm building those connections. I have that trust in not only the local leaders that I might interview, but the local public feel like they can contact me and tell me something they know about" (Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "By making every effort to cultivate relationships, report responsibly and accurately on local issues, avoid mistakes, but correct them immediately if they happen. Be fair, listen to diverse voices, and look at all sides of a story as objectively as possible. Acknowledge whatever my personal biases and preference may be so that I can keep them from coloring my reporting as best I can" (Appendix C).

4. What do you believe are the consequences of the public not trusting the Media or the News?

Question #4 was created to find out if the public's criticism of the Media has a potential danger of going too far. This question was intended to get expert opinions on how important the relationship between the Media and the public is.

- Jim Seimas: "I don't know what alternatives are if they don't trust the Media. How will they get any source of information?" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: "The public should be telling us things and we should be regurgitating that in a form that is easy for people to digest. It should be a copacetic relationship with the public. But it's not always" (Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "The growing distrust of the News Media is adding to a growing lack of civility in our national discourse. In social media it is common to see people blame the News Media for societal problems, or discount stories they disagree with attributing it to shedding, biased reporting. People are gravitating to sources that simply echo their beliefs rather than seeking out solid, credible reporting even thought may test and challenge their ideas" (Appendix C).

5. The literature I reviewed for this project says the distrust from the public is rooted in the belief that journalists are biased. Do you believe journalists are biased?

Question #5 was asked to bridge together the literature and the data collection from the interviews. The data collection from the expert sources can serve as commentary for or against the claims made by the literature.

- Jim Seimas: There's not as much fact checking as there should be but I still think that the truth eventually comes out. As a reporter your byline is there, you can only mess up so many times and, I'd like to hope, you're out of a job" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: "Absolutely there's bias. Nobody is born without bias. Everybody has life experiences that they draw on to make

decisions. We encourage people to vote in the United States – that's part of being American. So when you vote, that's a bias right there. You just picked one over another, right? Journalists are no different, but there's a huge difference between bias and *agenda*. If you take your bias and turn it into an agenda, then that's totally a problem" (Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "On an individual level bias, preference and familiarity are present in everyone, even journalists. Reporters must first acknowledge their own bias and preference, because without first admitting to those biases it is impossible to set them aside" (Appendix C).

6. Would you say partisanship on the part of the News or Media can actually help the public shape their own opinions?

Question #6 was asked to fill the hole from the literature. This question was the one that was not answered by any of the literature reviewed for this study.

- Jim Seimas: Yeah, I just feel like you know when you're getting something sensationalized. I think even then, if there's an opinion piece and you're questioning it and questioning how the reporting was done, if you have questions that the reporter answers by quoting reputable sources, then he or she did their job" (Appendix A).

- Randol White: One of the things that NPR training does is they want reporters and management at NPR news stations to make it really clear to the listeners if there is an overwhelming bias somewhere, that that exists. If there is something that we just really feel we need to let the listeners know that the bias exists, it helps pull any sort of agenda because now the listeners have the

information they need to filter what they're hearing this reporter say"

(Appendix B).

- Patti Piburn: "If a reporter or news outlet is presenting opinion, or is adhering

  to an agenda, then that needs to be made clear as part of the reporting. A clear

  line should be made between pundits and reporters, between opinion and

  analysis and fact based reporting. Providing expert opinion and analysis on a

  topic or issue can be beneficial to the public, rather than just presenting a

  laundry list of facts with no context and perspective, but this must be clear to

  the public that it is not fact-based reporting" (Appendix C).

**Media-Public Relationship and Media Bias Research Questions**

For this project, the following six research questions were formulated for the

study to determine how the public perceives the Media, and how the Media perceives the

public in turn. The questions were also about the Media's trustworthiness and the

consequences and benefits of accepting or rejecting a news outlet based off their

perceived bias.

**Research Question 1: Does the public trust the Media?**

- Feldman (2011) writes that people tend to be distrusting of the Media by

  default, "particularly perceptions of the host" (p. 407). In other words, the

  audience has a predisposition when consuming Media based on the source.

  It's an exercise of ad-hominem nature – discrediting the information being

  given because it comes from a journalist or pundit whose biases differ from

  the listener's. This is an example of the "Hostile Media Phenomenon."

**Research Question 2: How does this trust between the Media and the public get made?**

- According to Flores and Solomon (1998) the conception of a trusting relationship begins when both parties forgo the desire for power and control: "Trust entails lack of control, in that some power is transferred or given up to the person who is trusted" (p. 206).

- "Most treatments define trust in terms of a confident expectation regarding another's behavior. We shall see that this covers only half of its mechanism as it leaves out the essential component of a self-referential confidence in the subject's own judgment (Barbalet, 2009, p. 368).

**Research Question 3: Are reporters and journalists untrustworthy?**

- Ladd (2009) notices the public distrusts the Media during influential, national news: "More resistance to information about national conditions and other influential campaign news" (p. 573).

**Research Question 4: What are the consequences for distrusting the Media?**

- Dunbar-Hester's (2014) paper talks about the fine line between effective Media criticism and detrimental Media criticism. She writes that there is value in taking a stance against the Media in hopes for social change, but "the foundation upon which it rested was not necessarily stable" (p. 556).

**Research Question 5: Is having an agenda part of being a journalist?**

- "Some studies have found people on opposing side of a controversy, viewing identical coverage, with both concluding that the coverage was biased against their position" (Niven, 2012, p. 874).

**Research Question 6: Do Media agencies help the public shape their opinions?**

- None of the literature addresses how Media bias can aid the public's opinion. All of the literature regarding the prevalence of bias in the Media suggests the consequences of an untrustworthy relationship between the Media and the public. But none of the authors discuss the potential of a positive Media bias that helps the public formulate educated positions.

**Media-Public Relationship and Media Bias Data**

It was imperative for this study to see what other experts in the field of Media had to say about Media-public relations and Media bias considering there was so little existing literature on the subject. In order to obtain this data Jim Seimas, a professional reporter and newspaper editor, Randol White, a professional broadcast News Director, and Patti Piburn, a professional reporter, anchor, and Assistant Professor of Broadcast Journalism were interviewed for the study. Each interviewee was asked the same questions specifically designed to answer the original research questions in an individual interview setting. The following tables display the respondents' answers in the form of their individual perspectives on the original research questions.

**Research Question 1: Does the public trust the Media?**

The purpose of studying this research question was to find out how the public views the Media upon first glance. This question was designed to discover what the foundation of the relationship between the Media and the public looks like.

Ladd (2009) and Feldman (2011) both agree upon the existence of the "Hostile Media Phenomenon" when it comes to the Media-public relationship. Ladd (2009)

defines the phenomenon as "the tendency of people with divergent prior opinions" (p. 577). Feldman's definition is similar in that it characterizes the phenomenon as the public being "hostile to their own position" (p. 418).

Most of the literature reviewed for this research question found that the public distrusts the Media before the article, broadcast package or radio bite is even consumed.

Table 1 summarizes the answers this research question based on the responses from the interviewees. All three disagreed with the literature, believing most people do trust the media. Both White and Piburn agree that the public trusts the Media members more when they have a long-term investment in the community they report on.

Table 1

*Existence of Trust Between the Media and the Public*

| Respondent | Does the public trust the Media? | Why? |
|---|---|---|
| Jim Seimas | Yes | What choice do they have? |
| Randol White | Yes | Reporter's invested time in community |
| Patti Piburn | Yes | Reporter's invested time in community |

**Research Question 2: How does this trust between the Media and the public get made?**

The purpose of this research question was to provide examples of how the Media attempts to adhere to the public – perhaps eliminating the potential belief that Media members have bias and partisanship.

According to Flores and Solomon (1998) the conception of a trusting relationship begins when both parties forgo the desire for power and control: "Trust entails lack of

control, in that some power is transferred or given up to the person who is trusted" (p. 206).

Table 2 illustrates what the three interviewees believe to be the key to a trusting Media-public relationship. All three respondents agreed that a news outlet ought to tell the audience when there is a potential bias in the reporting. This coincides with the literature in that one must surrender the power or information needed for the other person to make an informed choice.

Table 2

*Creating Trust in the Media-Public Relationship*

| Respondent | How does a Media member gain the trust of the public? |
| --- | --- |
| Jim Seimas | Cultivating relationships by being honest with your reporting |
| Randol White | Alert the audience to potential bias |
| Patti Piburn | Admitting there is a bias in the reporting |

**Research Question 3: Are reporters and journalists untrustworthy?**

This question was created to have the experts comment on the relevance of bias in the profession. In other words: does the public have reason to worry?

Feldman (2011) characterizes the way in which the public trusts the media on a type of spectrum, quantifying how much "selective perception" is taking place amongst partisan viewers of the Media (p. 418). The public assesses the person relaying the information and makes a decision on whether or not the news is credible, or if it is coming from a biased source.

Table 3 presents the interviewees' beliefs on whether or not bias exists amongst journalists in the Media. All agree that there is bias, making the claims in the literature true, assuming the public has the same assumptions that the experts do.

Table 3

*Trusting Journalists*

| Respondent | Are journalists biased? |
| --- | --- |
| Jim Seimas | Yes, and it's good to make connections to your sources |
| Randol White | Yes, because every person has biases |
| Patti Piburn | Yes, because journalists are just like people |

**Research Question 4: What are the consequences for distrusting the Media?**

Research Question 4 was created to find out what can happen if the public turns on the Media because of the increasing belief that all journalists are biased and untrustworthy.

Dunbar-Hester's (2014) paper talks about the fine line between effective Media criticism and detrimental Media criticism. She writes that there is value in taking a stance against the Media in hopes for social change, but "the foundation upon which it rested was not necessarily stable" (p. 556).

Table 4 shows how both White and Piburn agree with the literature that the relationship between the Media and the public is a fine of give and take. The *two-way* relationship that White speaks of does not stand when the public fully abandons the Media.

Table 4

*Consequences for Distrusting the Media*

| Respondent | What are the consequences? |
| --- | --- |
| Jim Seimas | There will be nowhere else to go for information |
| Randol White | The two-way Media-public relationship is damaged |
| Patti Piburn | The relationship between the Media and public is damaged |

**Research Question 5: Is having an agenda part of being a journalist?**

This question was asked to establish whether or not bias ought to be part of a Media News outlet.

Niven (2012) addresses the question of whether partisanship exists in Media: "Some studies have found people on opposing side of a controversy, viewing identical coverage, with both concluding that the coverage was biased against their position" (p. 874). The literature for this study is consistent in saying that bias is subjective to the viewer, making certain biases visible to some and not others.

But because of that, one might suggest that given the Uses and Gratification Theory, is it not then justified for a news agency to hold biased views since the viewers are going to those mediums for that very thing?

Table 5 displays how all three experts agree that there is no room for bias if not revealed to the public. But the only difference is that Piburn believes that once a news organization surrenders itself to bias, it loses all credibility.

Table 5

*The Existence of Agenda in Reporting*

| Respondent | Should agenda hold a place in reporting? |
|---|---|
| Jim Seimas | No, unless expressed to viewer |
| Randol White | No, unless explained |
| Patti Piburn | No, once you accept bias, you've lost credibility |

**Research Question 6: Do Media agencies help the public shape their opinions?**

This question was created to discover whether or not bias can help the public form their own educated opinions. None of the literature answered this question, but the interviewees were split on it, with White and Seimas commenting that since the biases of news organizations are usually clear, an obvious bias can help the public shape their own opinion.

Table 6

*Media Bias Helping Public Opinion*

| Respondent | Can Media bias be beneficial to public opinion? |
|---|---|
| Jim Seimas | Yes, because the truth eventually comes out |
| Randol White | Yes, because often enough biases are clear |
| Patti Piburn | No |

# Chapter 5

*Discussion and Recommendations*

**Summary**

This study was conducted in response to a recent fascination with the relationship between the public and the Media, and how bias on behalf of the Media could be beneficial to the public in some way. Today, because of the surge of social media, all members of the public can become their own Media, acting as journalists themselves. Since most of the existing literature only identifies Media bias and does not attempt to qualify how it may be beneficial to the masses, research and data collection from experts were imperative to assess the state and future of the Media-public relationship.

To find out more information on the current state of the Media-public relationship, three experts from the field of journalism and mass Media were interviewed based on a single questionnaire designed to answer the following research questions for the study:

1. Does the public trust the Media?

2. How does this trust between the Media and the public get made?

3. Are reporters and journalists untrustworthy?

4. What are the consequences for distrusting the Media?

5. Is having an agenda part of being a journalist?

6. Do Media agencies help the public shape their opinions?

Each research question was altered slightly to create applicable questions with each interviewee. Also, some of the respondent's' answers covered more than one research

question making it redundant to repeat and ask again.  The questionnaire elicited a wide range of responses that had similar positions to those displayed in the literature.

**Discussion**

Through analyzing the data collected in Chapter 4, connections can be made between the expert interviewees' responses and the existing literature found in Chapter 2. Therefore, conclusions can be made regarding the following original research questions.

**Research Question 1:  Does the public trust the Media?**

All three of the experts responded by discussing their perspectives for what makes a trustworthy reporter or Media member.  White and Piburn said that because of the time they each invested into the community they work in, they have recognized a more trusting feedback from the public.

> You may find yourself at one place one year, and two years at the next place and signing a contract for three years at one place, if you're lucky, is a long time.  That sort of structure doesn't do much to serve the public because I believe you need to be in a location for years, a decade like I'm coming up on right now -- only now am I starting to feel like I'm building those connections.  I have that trust in not only the local leaders that I might interview, but the local public feel like they can contact me and tell me something they know about. (White, Appendix B)

Meanwhile, Seimas agrees that the Media is trusted by the public, but thinks so for a different reason.  Seimas finds that the public has no choice but to trust the Media because otherwise there are little places to get information from.

Although the literature disagrees with the interviewees that the public trusts the Media, it is possible to conclude that the public has always been willing to trust Media that is transparent. News organizations like the ones that where Seimas, White, and Piburn work make an effort to admit faults in their reporting, allowing for that transparent nature that the literature suggests a trusting relationship needs: "Trust entails lack of control, in that some power is transferred or given up to the person who is trusted" (Flores and Solomon, 1998, p. 206).

**Research Question 2: How does this trust between the Media and the public get made?**

The literature and the experts agree on the answer to this question. Both White and Piburn submit that being open with the public is the best way to gain trust.

Feldman writes that people tend to be distrusting of the Media by default, "particularly perceptions of the host" (p. 407). In other words, the audience makes up its mind on the credibility of the source depending on who is presenting it. Because of that, it would be reasonable to conclude that since the public creates perceptions of Media members before even digesting the information being given, White's and Piburn's approach of full transparency would create a positive predisposition in the public eye.

According to Piburn, once a news agency accepts its fall into partisanship, it is almost impossible to return to credibility. This would mean that the Media members who are trusted from the start are the ones who are transparent from the beginning.

**Research Question 3: Are reporters and journalists untrustworthy?**

The literature and the experts both agree on this: Media members are biased.  The separating factor is that the three experts interviewed for this study do not all agree that it is a bad thing.

Both White and Seimas believe that there is bias in news reporting, but that does not necessarily equate to *untrustworthy*.

"There's a huge difference between bias and *agenda*.  If you take your bias and turn it into an agenda, then that's totally a problem" (White, Appendix B).

White finds that *agenda* is when a Media member uses his or her biases and spins it in such a way that it seems as the truth of the situation – once one makes his or her beliefs gospel, he or she have gone too far.  These beliefs are okay, though, as White points out: "Just one word: *transparency*" (White, Appendix B).  Just be transparent, he says, and biases are excused to a degree.

**Research Question 4: What are the consequences for distrusting the Media?**

Dunbar-Hester's (2014) article points out how there's fine line between effective Media criticism and detrimental Media criticism.  She writes that there is much value in taking a stance against the Media in hopes for transparency, but "the foundation upon which it rested was not necessarily stable" (p. 556)

Part of what Dunbar-Hester is referring to is what Piburn alluded to about the Media-public relationship: "The growing distrust of the News Media is adding to a growing lack of civility in our national discourse" (Piburn, Appendix C).  This is where White's *two-way* relationship can be applied: both the Media and the public need to have

a civil discourse so that there is an equal understanding of what each side wants out of the relationship. The consequences of discounting the Media because of trust issues are the loss of the mutually beneficial relationship.

**Research Question 5: Is having an agenda part of being a journalist?**

Feldman (2011) characterizes the way in which the public trusts the Media by saying there is a "selective perception" taking place amongst partisan viewers of the Media (p. 418). According the White's comments, a belief like that is in itself a bias: "That's a bias right there. You just picked one over another, right? (White, Appendix B).

It comes back to that mutually beneficial; relationship that both the literature and the interviewees say is key to a harmonic Media-Public relationship: if there is to be a removing of the "power" that Flores and Solomon refer to, then both parties have to do what all the experts suggest: admit your bias, making you more trustworthy to the other side.

**Research Question 6: Do Media agencies help the public shape their opinions?**

This question was not answered by the literature, but the expert interviewees answered it.

White agrees that the Media helps shape the opinions of the public, and often the bias comes along with that: "We encourage people to vote in the United States -- that's part of being American. So when you vote -- that's a bias right there" (White, Appendix B).

So in other words, not only is a bias understandable, but it is encouraged. The literature states that the public itself uses bias when determining what Media to take in, par of the Uses and Gratification theory.

**Recommendations for Practice**

After completion of the study, considerable data has been collected and analyzed on the topic of Media-public relations, existence of Media bias and whether or not that bias can be beneficial to public opinion. It is imperative to highlight the most intriguing content and display it for future Media members. Some recommendations for practice include total transparency on the part of the Media member, creating a long-term investment with the community you report on, and admitting when a mistake has been made.

**Be open, all the time.**

Trust is the most important link in the Media-public relationship. Without it, the public will turn on the Media and become its own news agency.

Piburn says that, "the News Media provides information necessary for an informed public, which is key to a democracy" (Appendix C). A democracy in itself implies openness with those you serve. If the News Media is the driver of Democracy, then a trustworthy Media member (in the eyes of the public) is someone who forgoes the power of deception or an agenda-influenced spin on a story.

"Trust entails lack of control, in that some power is transferred or given up to the person who is trusted" (Flores and Solomon, 1998, p. 206). Flores and Solomon suggest a two-way relationship between the Media and the public, much like the relationship

White says every news organization should have: "The public should be telling us things and we should be regurgitating that in a form that is easy for people to digest" (Appendix B). Being open and transparent from the start and establishing that trust gives way for the two-way relationship to manifest, making for a trusting nature between the Media and the public.

### Connect with the source

Barbalet (2009) finds relationships such as the Media-public's as ones in need of trust, and in order for that trust to be had there is an "essentially emotional basis that is foundation to all trust" (p. 374).

White adds that this type of emotional connection is what really made his career as successful as it is today:

> A decade like I'm coming up on right now -- only now am I starting to feel like I'm building those connections. I have that trust in not only the local leaders that I might interview, but the local public feel like they can contact me and tell me something they know about (White, Appendix B).

Seimas agrees with White, and understands that bias is not necessarily a bad thing especially when it comes to a source for a news story: "Like, who's to say you can't come close to a source in some capacity. I think everyone you know in life, in general, has varying degrees of closeness" (Seimas, Appendix A). So when it comes to partisanship in the Media, the experts believe that bias is unavoidable and can often be beneficial when applied to sources from the public, so long as you invest it the right purposes into it, and stay transparent along the way.

**Admit when it has gone wrong.**

All three experts say it is impetrative for a Media member to admit when bias is apparent.

If a Media member is to take the advice from Flores and Solomon and "transfer" some power away, then he or she has be "something our listeners have told us they want. Just one word: *transparency*" (White, Appendix B).

What it comes down to is the willingness from both sides to give some leeway. The public has to understand that "there was a strategic value in framing '[the] media as a problem'" (Dunbar-Hester, 2014, p. 555-556) – it does no good to perceive all Media as the enemy because of a *perceived* bias.

Even granting that there is a bias, both White and Seimas agree that it is not too treacherous to carry a little bias around as a Media member. The one key to it all is to remember to stay open about it – admit your biases and trust from the public will soon follow.


**Study Conclusion**

In conclusion, given the research done on the Media-public relationship and the implications of Media bias, there should be research done regularly on the topic. Constant data collection via interviews of professional journalists should be a staple, for the world of Media-public relations has various interpretations of how to approach things like bias and transparency.

Although the study and recommendations do not apply to all individuals engulfed in the Media-public relationship, it does serve as an educational tool for how to approach

the Media-public relationship with a transparent nature – one that invests in then right

communities, understanding the benefits of bias when made publically clear.  This also

applies to soon-to-be college graduates entering any field that includes the integration of

an organization and the masses.

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# Appendix A

*Interview Transcription:*
Aidan Mathews: "My first question for you is: as an expert how would you describe the relationship between the media and the public?"

Jim Seimas: "It seems like so much of… so many sources don't want to get burned so they're apprehensive in discussing certain things with reporters. You have to earn trust and being here 20 years has helped immensely. This community is so small that people talk to each other and say 'I trust that guy' so that helps. I've had situations where I've messed up, you know. It's a learning experience and I had to regain that trust."

AM: "Do you have an example of that?"

JS: "I do. It was two golf coaches bad mouthing each other and it was so long ago but I believe it had something to do with a league tournament. And they were going to replay this much because they didn't like the format, because they thought it was beneficial for one team. So I interviewed both of these coaches and both coaches were cool with the interview but they said 'Sit on it for two weeks and wait until the end of the season'.

"Well something else I covered came up and I put like a small sentence expressing their frustrations in that game article instead of sitting on it for two weeks and though 'What's the big deal of two weeks? Like why would they even care?' And so that hurt some people you know.

"There was another situation where Aptos high had a good baseball team and I was a little too gung-ho about how I pursued it. I treated everything I did like it was the Super Bowl. I really wanted to be the first to break it and beat Aptos Times and beat the Pajaronian and beat the Mercury News when they used to cover this area. So when Aptos had a nationally ranked baseball team I was incredibly persistent in how I was chasing that story. I called the principle of the school at like 10:30 at night -- a little later than I should have, probably shouldn't call anybody after 10:00. Somehow that got back to my editor and he was fired up at me in a negative way.

"Aside from that I think it depends. If we do something wrong a letter or message will be left with our managing editor. So I feel like my coworkers and myself do a pretty good job fact checking, that's not to say we're perfect, errors still get into the paper. There's

also an opportunity for people to log into Facebook and leave comments on the comment board that make you look bad.  They'll log in and say 'that's horrible reporting, I didn't say that at all' or they can refute what you've said.  Trust is earned by not having any of those comments."

AM: Yeah that's already happened to me.  The first story they gave me at the Sentinel, there was a comment on the website from someone who wanted this one piece of information that I didn't include.  So they wrote 'Horrible reporting', so my first glimpse of viewer disapproval, something I'm sure you deal with a lot."

JS: "Oh definitely.  We can't fact-check everything.  It's a severely different process than it used to be.  We used to design everything, we used to write our own headlines, but now we choose a template for what we want our page to look like and we share it in this cloud-like thing for the people in Chico who design our paper, and we tell them what story we want where, it's pretty brutal."

AM:  "What do you do as a reporter to try and gain trust?  How do you make an interviewee feel comfortable enough to talk to you?

JS: "There are situations where I can say 'Hey, my editor wants me to write this' which isn't fair, but you know.  There was this one situation in Scotts Valley, the school wanted new lights for the football stadium and some nearby residents didn't want them.  I was interviewing this guy who said he didn't want me to run this story, but I thought it was newsworthy so I said 'I got to, it's my job'.  So I ended up writing the story and it was very involved and a lot of fun to write and then all of a sudden the neighbors filed a lawsuit against the school district and the school district didn't want any part of it.  So now they're not getting lights.  And part of me feels responsible for that, because there's no better thing for a school than to get football lights.  Part of me felt like I betrayed a very loyal source, but I was open with him saying, 'I have to write this' and he wasn't happy about it.  It took some time to get him back because he was frustrated, took some time for stuff to burn off.  Stuff wears off after a while, but I am never out to try and burn anyone.

"Sometimes you have to do stories that doesn't put people in a good light, but it's newsworthy.  So you just have to say it: 'I'm just doing my job'.

AM: "How do you deal with that, when you have to do a story that makes a source look bad?  Does it happen a lot?"

JS: "The weird part is this community is so small that if you burn enough bridges you're going to be an horrible writer because you won't have anyone to go to.  There's been times where the Santa Cruz High basketball team has not talked to us for a whole season just because something was reported that they didn't like.  There's been several of those situations.  It's usually with athletic directors over the hiring and firing of coaches.

"So when you do those types of stories, it's kind of weird, the catch-22 is sometimes the interviewee is really open and talking casually about something and then you hear something and jump in saying 'I got to write something on that'. And they say 'don't do that' and I say 'I can word around it and make it seem like I didn't get it from you'. When that happens they're a little frustrated."

AM: "Much of the literature I've read for research in this project said the public doesn't trust the Media because of the potential for biases amongst journalists. For yourself, or based off what you've heard from other journalists, do you think the public trusts the Media in general, and is there bias involved in journalism?

JS: "I think most of the readership is smart enough to know what the source is and how well-researched the reporting is. I think for the most part the public trusts the Media. As a reporter I trust what I hear on television and read. I would question why people shouldn't.

"But with tweets and podcasts and blogs, everyone can be their own reporter and do research on the people giving out the information. So if you work for a reputable news source, people will think you've gone through the right routes to become a professional within that industry, learning how to protect themselves, the paper and their interviewee. So I feel like I have to trust what I am reading."

AM: "Yeah, I always felt like, at some point, the truth comes out at anyway."

JS: "Yeah, I just feel like you know when you're getting something sensationalized. I think even then, if there's an opinion piece and you're questioning it and questioning how the reporting was done, if you have questions that the reporter answers by quoting reputable sources, then he or she did their job.

"There's not as much fact-checking as there should be but I still think that the truth eventually comes out. As a reporter your byline is there, you can only mess up so many times and, I'd like to hope, you're out of a job."

AM: "Yeah one of the things I found out working for school Media like Mustang News at Cal Poly is: interviewing college students is the worst thing in the world, and I am a college student. Because of the anarchist thing with being a young kid and I feel like I've always had to explain to someone why they should talk to me and that I am not out there to make them look bad in an article or broadcast package. I always try to tell interviewees: 'It doesn't benefit me in anyway to report something that's wrong. I get just as screwed as you do for putting the wrong information'."

JS: "Yeah, it just sucks how people go off what they have in their own head. I'm not always right, when I tell stories to my buddies they always say 'No that's not how it was', we always have different opinions.

"I did a story the other day and it was a fundraiser-type story and I hate doing fundraiser stories."

AM: "Why?"

JS: "Just because. It's just not what we do. They can just take out an ad. But it's a touchy subject because the girl is battling an illness and dying from it and they have to raise money to pay for hospital bills. And I got an email after doing the story from her mom asking me to change a number in the story. To make it seem like a more dire situation."

AM: "Did she want you to change the number to something that wasn't true? Make it seem more dire?"

JS: "Well it was still a dire situation. But I said to her: 'This is what you said I can't change that number'. If I make an error I will change it. So knowing reporters do that makes it that most of what you read is probably correct."

AM: "What are the consequences if the public doesn't trust the Media?"

JS: "The Media is not going to go away, and people will always go to the source they do trust. I think people do trust their Media, they're going somewhere for news. It's weird because people read stories when they already know what happened, to either comment or refute what they read. So for things like that, I don't know what alternatives are if they don't trust the Media. How will they get any source of information?"

AM: "You said this is a small community. Do you think that your readers knowing you as person helps?"

JS: "There's so much social media out there and I don't mind people using that to get to know me better. I try to be as involved with the community as much as possible.

"I have a lot of local athletes as friends on social Media in order to track them down. You're supposed to be unbiased, but a good person is a good person. When you think of Howard Cossell and Muhammed Ali, they had something that was larger than the working relationship and I think there are still ways of having that. Like, who's to say you can't come close to a source in some capacity. I think everyone you know in life, in general, has varying degrees of closeness.

"If I ever take a side, it's for the sake of the underdog or a better story. So I am always rooting for the better story. But the reader will always be reading with their thoughts about what you are, so if you're willing to share more of your life with them to share who you really are to dispel some of their beliefs then I guess that's okay.

"Also, having those relationships makes writing stories easier.  So you don't have to wait a few days to hear back from an athletic director, you can just hear from the athlete in half an hour or something.

"I've been accused of being overly close with certain coaches but I've also written articles about those same coaches that have irritated them.  SO you gotta take it with a grain of salt what people believe and think about you because you know in your own heart what it is you're trying to get done."

AM:  "Well thanks, that's all the questions I have."

JS:  "No, thank you."

# Appendix B

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a professional journalistic perspective based on a questionnaire about the public's perception of the Media and trustworthiness of Media members.
Interviewer: Aidan Mathews
Respondent: News Director at KCBX Central Coast Public Radio
(Randol White)
Date of Interview: 7/21/16

*Interview Transcription:*
Aidan Mathews: "As an expert in your field, could you describe what you think the relationship between the Media and the public is?"

Randol White: "I believe the Media's relationship with the public is: the Media should be informing the public on issues of the day, in our case community aspects. It should be -- it's not in all cases -- but it should be a two-way relationship with the public. The public should be telling us things and we should be regurgitating that in a form that is easy for people to digest. It should be a copacetic relationship with the public. But it's not always."

AM: "Do you have an example in your past work experience where you have had that sort of 'two-way' kind of relationship? Is it *connections* that help that relationship?"

RW: "Connections totally help it. The longer you can remain in one place, like geographically one place, I think the better you can serve as a representative of the Media. So I've been here on the Central Coast now it'll be 10 years in October, and I also went to Cal Poly prior to that.

"Early in your career you jump around a lot, or many people do especially if you're trying to move up the Media ladder and get to larger and larger markets. You may find yourself at one place one year, and two years at the next place and signing a contract for three years at one place, if you're lucky, is a long time. That sort of structure doesn't do much to serve the public because I believe you need to be in a location for years, a decade like I'm coming up on right now -- only now am I starting to feel like I'm building those connections. I have that trust in not only the local leaders that I might interview, but the local public feel like they can contact me and tell me something they know about."

AM: "So you would say that because you've been in the same place so long, the public will trust you more?"

RW: "It can go both ways. They'll trust more if you're good at what you do and you don't twist things for an agenda and those sorts of things. If you're good at what you do and you are being an honest journalist then yeah, over those 10 years you gain a lot of

trust. I've had people in the field tell me before -- it just happened two days ago I was recording an interview in the production studio and when we got down with the interview I told the person: 'We just spoke for 20 minutes but I have to make this a four minute segment. So three quarters of what you said, you're not going to hear it when the piece is aired.' And he said, 'I'm not worried at all about you're editing. I've heard many examples of it and you don't twist what people say'."

AM: "That's got to feel good to hear that."

RW: "Yeah, so that made me feel great when I heard that. That was literally two days ago. So it's stuff like that that lets you know, (a) that you're doing a good job and (b) that you're getting trust from the community."

AM: "A lot of the literature reviewed for this project had a commonality that the reason the public distrusts the Media is because the belief is the Media has a bias. Do you think, in any form of journalism, that bias comes with it?

RW: "Absolutely there's bias. Nobody is born without bias. Everybody has life experiences that they draw on to make decisions. We encourage people to vote in the United States -- that's part of being American. So when you vote -- that's a bias right there. You just picked one over another, right? Journalists are no different, but there's a huge difference between bias and *agenda*. If you take your bias and turn it into an agenda, then that's totally a problem. One of the things that NPR training does is they want reporters and management at NPR news stations to make it really clear to the listeners if there is an overwhelming bias somewhere, that that exists. That's something our listeners have told us they want. Just one word: *transparency*. Just say: 'Our reporter *Susie Cue*, or whatever, was hit by a drunk driver when she was a teenager and she is now reporting on for us on this new legislation regarding drunk driving' or something. If there is something that we just really feel we need to let the listeners know that the bias exists, it helps pull any sort of agenda because now the listeners have the information they need to filter what they're hearing this reporter say.

"Hidden agendas are the worst because then you have a point that you want to push through your reporting. It has existed in Media for a really long time. The Hearst papers way back in the early twentieth century were well known for it. Broadcast has had stricter rules than newspapers -- newspapers can be blatantly one way or the other. Broadcast has sort of evolved into that with cable networks like Fox and MSNBC that have clear agendas. But you know what those agendas are when you're watching."

AM: "So it almost helps you create your opinion because you can filter since it's so obvious."

RW: "Right. During the Republican Convention, I've been switching around to other networks because I want to see how they're portraying it."

AM: "Yeah when I was watching the Convention, when you're not watching it on Fox you can see the small little things they point out like Trump walking out to Queen is mentioned a lot more, almost poking fun at it. Whereas Fox will be like, 'yeah that was pretty cool' and then move on to the next thing."

RW: "I heard that exact same thing that you pointed out. So I believe bias totally exists, I don't think there's anything wrong with bias, but good reporters and good newsroom management should make sure that that bias does not work its way into a piece. And if it does, because there's an overwhelming bias that can't be removed and it's not necessarily a bad bias, then it needs to be explained to the listeners and the viewers so there's full transparency."

# Appendix C

*Interview Transcripts: Patti Piburn*

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a professional journalistic perspective based on a questionnaire about the public's perception of the Media and trustworthiness of Media members.

Interviewer: Aidan Mathews

Respondent: Assistant Professor of Broadcast Journalism and a news anchor and reporter for KCOY in Santa Maria, California and KKFX in San Luis Obispo, California.

Date of Interview: 7/26/16

*Interview Transcription:*

Aidan Mathews: "So my senior project is on the public's perception of the Media, and most importantly, how much the public trusts the Media. How would you, as an expert in the field describe the relationship between the News Media and the public?"

Patti Piburn: "The News Media provides information necessary for an informed public, which is key to a democracy. The public consumes the information, as well as give feedback, and contributes ideas, opinions and stories."

AM: "As a reporter and journalist, do you feel the public trusts you?"

PP: "I do feel trusted by the people in the community where I've worked for more than 10 years as a journalist."

AM: "Any examples of when you felt that trust?"

PP: "On many occasions, members of the public have entrusted me with a story tip they thought I should cover. For example, a man told me about the impending closure of a local power plant that provided roughly $850,000 in yearly revenue to the city it was located in, provided jobs, and in turn the people employed by the plant put the money back into the local economy. The closure of the plant was a big issue. This man trusted me with that information and to protect his identity because he could have been fired.

"I have had occasion to interact with people who distrust the Media. I encountered a couple who were scheduled to appear live in our morning show for a gardening segment, but they refused when they saw our news live truck labeled with our call letters and affiliates. I worked for KCOY and KKFX a CBS and Fox affiliate. The couple associated our FOX station with FOX News and because of their intense dislike of Fox News refused to go on our show."

AM: "What do you do or what have you done to gain the trust of the public?"

PP: "I have gained the trust and respect of the people in my community through years of meticulous reporting. By making every effort to cultivate relationships, report

responsibly and accurately on local issues, avoid mistakes, but correct them immediately if they happen.  Be fair, listen to diverse voices, and look at all sides of a story as objectively as possible.  Acknowledge whatever my personal biases and preference may be so that I can keep them from coloring my reporting as best I can."

AM:  "What do you believe are the consequences of the public not trusting the Media or the News?  And do you have any examples in your experience of this consequence happening?"

PP:  "The growing distrust of the News Media is adding to a growing lack of civility in our national discourse.  In social media it is common to see people blame the News Media for societal problems, or discount stories they disagree with attributing it to shedding, biased reporting.  People are gravitating to sources that simply echo their beliefs rather than seeking out solid, credible reporting even thought may test and challenge their ideas.  People like John Milton and Thomas Jefferson envision a marketplace of ideas where truth comes from the competition of free ideas and open public discourse.  Distrust of the News Media undermines our democracy, which needs a free press to remain healthy.

"A combination of distrust for the Media and the growth of technology, the internet and social media is leading to a dramatic change in gatekeeping.  Gatekeeping is the process through which news items either get in or stay out of the news cycle.  But, now with the Internet, social media and technology the public is playing a greater role in gatekeeping.  This means people can 'retreat their own corners' and consume only media that reinforces their ideas and beliefs and avoid Media that challenges or runs counter to their ideas and beliefs.  This leads to a less informed electorate and allows people to deny and discount the ideas of others while becoming more entrenched in their own."

AM:  "The literature I reviewed for this project says the distrust from the public is rooted in the belief that journalists are biased.  Do you believe journalists are biased?  Is having a bias part of being a journalist; does it come naturally with the profession?"

PP:  "On an individual level bias, preference and familiarity are present in everyone, even journalists.  Reporters must first acknowledge their own bias and preference, because without first admitting to those biases it is impossible to set them aside.  Beyond the individual level there are news outlets that have an agenda.  This means it is up to the public to be savvy news consumers, practice critical thinking and take in information from a variety of sources."

AM: "Would you say partisanship on the part of the News or Media can actually help the public shape their own opinions?  Do obvious biases from journalists or pundits benefit the public in any way?"

PP:  "If a reporter or news outlet is presenting opinion, or is adhering to an agenda, then that needs to be made clear as part of the reporting.  A clear line should be made between pundits and reporters, between opinion and analysis and fact based reporting.  Providing

expert opinion and analysis on a topic or issue can be beneficial to the public, rather than just presenting a laundry list of facts with no context and perspective, but this must be clear to the public that it is not fact-based reporting."