Media Bias: How the bias affects public perceptions of the media and what can be done to further prevent erosion of media-public relationship

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Bachelor of Science in Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The following study investigates the concept and nature of media bias and provides recommendations for those in the media in order to create a more transparent environment for journalists and the general public. This transparency is necessary for trust to be established once again between the media and the publics they serve. However, “serve” may be an inappropriate term, as the term denotes a willingness to render assistance without the thought of pay or other favorable services in return. This study realizes that the media consists largely of money-making entities, and forms such recommendations in the expectation that following the recommendations provided in this study will help consolidate, if not proliferate, media corporations’ profits. This paper contains interviews with three media professionals, whose answers are the fundamental foundations upon which this study creates a case for the existence of bias in the media. The perpetuation of media bias is acknowledged and explained, although for the most part, such “bias” is due to the unintentional personal perspectives of the journalists themselves. This paper attempts to remedy this problem, which may soon lead to even greater dissatisfaction, perhaps even resentment, if the pervasive perception of media bias is not rectified.
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Chapter 1

*Introduction*

**Statement of the Problem**

Many Americans are angry with the media. Every poll done since the 1990’s has consistently stated one persisting sentiment among the public- the media is biased. Whether the media is perceived as too liberal or too conservative- too restrained or too sensational- the perceptions of the media by the publics they serve are counterproductive. However, it should be noted that their anger with the media is merely a symptom of a larger and complex problem arising from the lack of trust. The trust that is essential for the media to continue functioning as the watchdog of the government has corroded to an alarming point. As Baron (2004) explains, “Bias and the resulting skepticism reduce the demand for news, which leaves the issue of whether profit-maximizing news organizations would tolerate bias in their news reports and whether bias would persist with competition among news organizations.” The bias perpetuated by the media leaves many people disillusioned and unsatisfied, which culminates into resentment and ultimately cynicism. Cynicism can and often does negatively affect the media, as news consumers who feel as if the media organizations they patronize is untrustworthy are far less likely to continue to purchase from that organization. The impending consequence is essentially the erosion of the news corporations’ profits. Unfortunately, the consequences of media bias are often overlooked by media practitioners. In fact, many economic models have argued that news organizations, if they are to maximize their profits, should pursue a slanted and partisan coverage of the news. Of course, this further pushes the vast majority of publics who aren’t beholden to certain ideological factions away from the medium whose function is to provide unbiased
information to the public. Ultimately and, perhaps inevitably, the relationship between the public and the media will have disintegrated to the point where the media will have lost its crucial function as the guardian of public interests.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to better understand the subject of media bias as well as to provide the foundational basis for the survey on media bias. Through these research questions, a comprehensive survey can be created in which the results can be systematically and objectively measured to see if there is, in fact, media bias.

1. What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?
2. If there is substantiating bias, then how does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?
3. How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?
4. Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?
5. If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?
6. What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?

Definition of Term

Although many people may use these words interchangeably, for the purposes of this paper the words provided below will have specific and distinct meanings that will have different connotations and uses.
**Media:** the means of communication, as radio and television, newspapers, and magazines, that reach or influence people widely (dictionary.com).

**Media Bias:** Media bias is the bias or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories that are reported and how they are covered (definitions.net)

**Bias:** a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned (dictionary.com)

**News organizations:** an organization that collects and gives news to newspapers, magazines, television news programs, and radio stations (Merriam-Webster.com).

**Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 includes a background of the problem, a purpose of the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter 2 will determine the methods that must be developed to identify the problem of media bias by studying and referencing scholarly literature regarding media bias. Chapter 3 will be the methodology of the study, or how I will gather information for the study. Chapter 4 will collect the information and present it in a clear and efficient manner. This data will then be compared with the literature review in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 will summarize the results and provide the necessary recommendations in order to begin remedying the pervasive problem of media bias.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature outline is to outline the foundations of media bias and to find and address methods to address this bias and repair media-public trust through targeted approaches.

Substantiating Evidence for Media Bias

No progress can commence unless the fundamental question involving media bias is asked and definitively answered: Is there bias in the media? However, one must define what bias specifically is. For the purposes of this paper, the term and definition of bias will be borrowed from Grosclose and Milyo, who analyzed and published a paper (2005) that is still relevant today. “Before proceeding, it is useful to clarify our definition of bias. Most important, the definition has nothing to do with the honesty or accuracy of the news outlet. Instead, our notion is more like a taste or preference” (p. 1204).

Just as important is differentiating among words that colloquially are used interchangeably. Bias should be separated in meaning and definition from ideology and spin. According to Mullainathan and Shleifer (2002), “Ideology is the goal of media outlets to sway public opinion, and spin is the attempt to produce a story that the public considers memorable”.

Countless studies have been done that show a varying degree of bias in the media, which ultimately makes the task of determining how much bias is present in the media difficult to establish. However, these countless studies do have a similar conclusion. While the level of bias is inconclusive, all of these studies agree- there is bias in the media. The Society of Professional Journalists’ (1996) Code of Ethics clearly states that journalists should “never distort the content
of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.” Despite such safeguards in place to steer journalists in the appropriate direction of objectivity, these are not enough to prevent bias from seeping into news coverage.

Indeed, it is troubling when there is evidence to support the claim that institutions and media watchdogs that proclaim to fight bias are themselves biased. Interestingly, researchers found that well known organizations, which purport to advocate objectivity, are themselves biased. Liberal websites (e.g., MediaWatch.org, FAIR, Common Dreams.org) argue that the media are unfairly conservative in their reporting. Conversely, conservative Web sites (e.g., MediaResearch.org, National Review Online) assert that the media are biased. Both state their claims with evidence, but overall there is a flavor and suggestion that liberals think conservatives are swaying the news and vice versa.

One of the most comprehensive of these studies was published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics. Aptly named “A Measure of Media Bias”, the study attempted to objectively quantify media bias by applying a unique standard that could easily be reproduced by others seeking similar conclusions. To measure bias, the authors recorded the number of times a news organization cited certain think tanks for sources for news coverage and compared the results to the amount of times partisan members of Congress cited those same sources. The results were not unexpected. “Our results show a strong liberal bias. All of the news outlets except Fox News' Special Report and the Washington Times received a score to the left of the average member of Congress. And a few outlets, including the New York Times and CBS Evening News, were closer to the average Democrat in Congress than the center. These findings refer strictly to the news stories of the outlets” (Grosclose & Milyo, 2005). In tandem with public suspicions,
studies show that most people’s deeply held convictions that the media has a liberal slant is well-founded.

**Political Bias in Media**

This new information begs the question: why is the media slanted and more sympathetic towards liberal attitudes and principles? The answer lies in the general composition of the media. Survey research consistently shows that the overwhelming majority of journalists identify as liberal. In 1992, Povich (1996) reported that a mere 7% of Washington political news correspondents voted for George H.W. Bush, which sharply contrasts with the 37% of Americans who voted for Bush. However, it should be noted that these statistics seem to be endemic only to the journalists in Washington D.C. Even in dependably liberal congressional districts like Ninth California district, which contains Berkeley, 12% of journalists voted for Bush in 1992. In the Eighth Massachusetts District, home of Cambridge, 19% of correspondents voted for Bush, almost triple in size compared to their colleagues in Washington.

The trend of liberal journalists dominating the medias hasn’t died down at all since the early 90’s. According to a study by Willnat and Weaver (2014), the number of journalists who claim to be Republican dropped significantly from that of 2002-7.1% from 18%. On the other hand, the number of journalists who identify as Democrat remained at 28.1%. That means for every conservative journalist, there are four liberals working in the media.

Although these results may be enough for some to condemn the media of partisanship and unfair discrimination, it may be an incompetent fallacy to state that, because journalists vote and identify with liberal ideology, they necessarily convey that bias into their news coverage. However, attempts by media practitioners and critics to explain how exactly such personal
convictions don’t translate into biased coverage has fallen short of any convincing answers. Perhaps Crouse (1973) has the most convincing answer:

Since most reporters are moderate or liberal Democrats themselves, they try to offset their natural biases by going out of their way to be fair to conservatives. If a reporter has been trained in the traditional, "objective" school of journalism, this ideological and social closeness to the candidate and the staff makes him feel guilty; he begins to compensate; the more he likes and agrees with the candidate personally, the harder he judges him professionally. Like a coach sizing up his own son in spring try outs, the reporter becomes doubly severe. (p. 355-356).

Public Perception and Mistrust

Perhaps more important than determining if actual bias exists in the media is the public perception of bias in the media. A news organization can have practically no bias in its news coverage; yet such a fact wouldn’t matter at all if the public perceived the news organization as biased. For example, a survey done by the American Society of Newspaper Editors bolstered the conclusions of these studies conducted. In the poll, an astounding 78% of participants were convinced that the media was biased in reporting (ASNE, 1999).

Publics tend to favor news organizations and their subsequent news coverage if the contents are consistent with the publics’ preconceived convictions and beliefs. Unfortunately, media organizations cater to this preference by skewering their news coverage with a liberal or conservative bias. Mullainathan and Shleifer (2003) provide the best model for further inquiry into the reasoning behind this phenomenon. It is quite easy to pin the blame on news organizations for covering what should be objective journalism with sensationalistic flare and
political bias. As previously mentioned, the corporation merely caters to the publics it desires. This forms a symbiotic relationship where the news organizations and publics feed each other; the corporation has a loyal and dependable following in which to gain revenues from advertisers and the publics receive information that doesn’t question their convictions.

The media market doesn’t provide much incentive for media organizations to maintain objectivity in the face of increasing potential profits from biased news reporting. The clear majority of news organizations shouldn’t be seen as public services. They should be primarily viewed as corporations in which the motivation for making news is consistent revenues.

Public perceptions of the media are also based on the political make-up of the public. Hamilton [2004] studied Pew Center polls of media bias. “The surveys show—unsurprisingly—that conservatives tend to believe that there is a liberal bias in the media, while liberals tend to believe there is a conservative bias” (Grosclose & Milyo, ,2005). The political position people affiliate with are also the lens of which people perceive the bias. So, while the media has bias according to the most recent empirical studies, the public perceptions of the media also compound the problem of media bias. If bias is to be eliminated, or at the very least, mitigated for the sake of public confidence in the media, then there must be a role the public must play as well to ensure that both parties are contributing to the solution to this deteriorating problem.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the interviews, which is the method with which information was collected, the participants involved in the interviews and the limitations and delimitations involved in the completion of the interviews.

Data Source

For these interviews, the participants will answer a series of questions regarding political bias in the media. Once completed, the interviews will be transcribed and the results compared and contrasted in order to detect discernable patterns among a knowledgeable group of media professionals. The interviews will specifically target the professionals’ general perception of the media as well as if they believe the media contains bias.

Participants

The participants of the survey are all current media professionals with, at the minimum, decades of experience in broadcast journalism in both television and radio. Patti Piburn and Richard Gearhart are currently professors at the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), where they teach journalism. Professor Piburn has worked in broadcast television for over two decades before switching to KCBX, a NPR-affiliate. Professor Gearhart is still in television broadcast, working for over twenty years at KSBY, a local television station broadcasting in the San Luis Obispo County region. Randol White, who lives in San Luis Obispo and is a Cal Poly alumni, is the managing news director for KCBX Public Radio, providing daily
content of news in the Central Coast region. KCBX broadcasts as far north as Salinas and as far south as Ventura.

**Interview Design**

The interview is designed to capture the essence of the participants’ perceptions of the media. To that end, the media professionals will be presented with questions from the research questions list formulated at the beginning of this project and expected to answer to the best of their ability. The participants will be encouraged to answer each question with an in-depth approach provided through years of experience in the media. The interview will be entirely about the topic of media bias, with follow-up questions asked to clarify a previous answer, if necessary. That way, the answers each of the media professionals provide will be clear and without any need for translation or assumption.

The following questions and probes were asked each of the professionals:

1. What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?
2. If there is substantiating bias, then how does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?
3. How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?
4. Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?
5. If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?
6. What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?
7. What steps should the media take to prevent unfair bias from seeping back into coverage?

Data Collection

The data collected for this interview will be conducted during each of the professor’s office hours, when they are most available. For Randol White, the best time available for him will be sorted through email, as he has a full-time job as managing news director of KCBX. The interview will ask some basic questions about the general beliefs of each participant. However, the main point of the interviews is to extract the general perception of each participant and contrast that to the general beliefs of the public. The participants were not presented with incentives for completing the interview. However, each of the participants stated they will make time for the interview for a minimum of ten minutes, so the promise of participating may have acted as an incentive.

Data Presentation

The data from the interviews was compiled together and compared and contrasted to see of any similarities among the participants’ beliefs. As the interviews collected is from an audio recorder and transcribed, there is no way to manipulate the information. To ensure absolute trust is maintained throughout the study, the transcriptions after the interview is included in the project in the appendixes.
Limitations

The study conducted was limited both in terms of time constraints and virtually no revenue involved. The time of the study must be followed according to the quarter system of the California Polytechnic State University, which is ten weeks, not including finals week. Due to this time restraint, more detailed information, as well as a larger pool of media professionals, was not possible. Also, the lack of funding for this project means that the interviews conducted was limited to the city itself, as farther interviews must either be conducted through the phone- which is limited due to time constraints- or the use of a car. With funding, the interview could have benefitted from more in-depth interviews from media professionals and the funding could mean the hiring of people to help analyze the information in greater detail.

Delimitations

Due to the time constraints, delimitations were imposed on this study, especially the survey itself as well as interpreting it afterwards. The interviews had to be done according to the schedule and convenience of each of the three media professionals. The interviews were done in one day due to the available restraints. Considering the financial restraints as well, the interviews were recorded from an audio recorder on loan from the State of California, which expended no money whatsoever.
This chapter will attempt to clarify and provide the method used to gather the information necessary for my report on media bias. To this end, three media professionals will be interviewed whose data will provide the necessary information on media bias which I can then use to formulate a recommendation for identifying and combating media bias. The data gathered was compared to the answers of all three media professionals, and any similarities and differences were noted. These results will be the comprehensive answers for the questions asked in the literature review in Chapter 2.

**Method of Collecting Data**

The main method of collecting the data necessary to formulate a comprehensive answer to media bias is identifying three appropriate and relevant media professionals and interviewing them in a suitable location. To that end, the interviews will be scheduled according to the availability of each participant. Due to the fact that two of the three media professionals are also professors at a prestigious state university, the most appropriate times to interview these individuals is during their office hours. According to their time schedules, the best time to complete the interviews is on Wednesday, March 9, 2016. The first professional, Professor Richard Gearhart, is available from 1:30-2:00 PM Pacific Standard Time. The second, Professor Patti Piburn, is available from 3:00-3:30 PM Pacific Standard Time. The third media professional has a full-time job at a public radio station. Therefore, that individual will be contacted at least two weeks prior to determine the best available time for the interview. Also important to note, each individual will be told ahead of time what the general topic of the
interview will be, although none of them will be given the specific questions ahead of time as to avoid nonorganic and rehearsed answers to the questions.

**Description of Participating Experts in Related Fields**

As previously stated, the participants of the survey are all current media professionals with, at the minimum, decades of experience in broadcast journalism in both television and radio. Patti Piburn and Richard Gearhart are currently professors at the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), where they teach journalism. Professor Piburn has worked in broadcast television for over two decades before switching to KCBX, a NPR-affiliate. Professor Gearhart is still in television broadcast, working for over twenty years at KSBY, a local television station broadcasting in the San Luis Obispo County region. Randol White, who lives in San Luis Obispo and is a Cal Poly alumni, is the managing news director for KCBX Public Radio, providing daily content of news in the Central Coast region. KCBX broadcasts as far north as Salinas and as far south as Ventura.

**Dissection of Interview Questions and Answers**

Each media professional was asked to respond to the following questions to the best of their abilities about media bias:

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th><em>Is there substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patti Piburn</td>
<td>“I think that evidence could be found.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Gearhart</td>
<td>“I don’t think there is substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randol White</td>
<td>“The media’ is too broadly based to answer this question with any degree of accuracy.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?

This question was asked to determine the direction of the interview. If the participant argued for it or against it would determine the general tone and foundation for the interview.

- Patti Piburn: “I think that evidence could be found. I don't have any examples off the top of my head. But I think if you did any examination of either Fox or MSNBC, and probably at times CNN, even though they to stay in the middle, I'm sure you could find it. I can't think of an example for you at the moment.” (Appendix A).

- Richard Gearhart: “I don’t think there is substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased. I think that it would be impossible for every reporter and every media outlet to not have some personal bias. I don’t think you could eliminate all personal bias altogether and I guess I would argue that probably a certain type of person is attracted to the job of being in the media. So, I guess you could argue that there’s the potential for accidental bias, but I don’t think there would be any evidence of actual…evidence that you could substantiate that would actually indicate political bias.” (Appendix B).

- Randol White: “‘The media’ is too broadly based to answer this question with any degree of accuracy. Are some individual media outlets biased? My answer would be, yes. Is ‘the media’ as a whole biased? There are nearly as many political representations in the media as there are possible positions. My perspective is that—in most cases—people know what those are and gravitate toward the outlets they’re most comfortable with politically, and in some cases, that means embracing those with a neutral stance.” (Appendix C).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Patti Piburn</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Gearhart</td>
<td>“And so, by its very nature, [the media] probably attracts people who may be more liberal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randol White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. If there is substantiating bias, then how does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?

Question 2 is designed to follow-up on the initial question of media bias. This question is unique in that, depending on how the previous question is answered, this question may be either entirely relevant or ignored completely. This is also to ask whether the media is driven by one political bias— a more liberal one— than another. This may shed some light on how the term “liberal, mainstream media” came to be.

- Richard Gearhart: “Yeah, but I guess my point is- and you have to be careful how you say this. And that’s why I’m trying to be really careful on how I say this. Again, what I would say is that those people who are attracted to working in the media; if you were to generalize the kind of personality that would be attracted to working in the media or would aspire to get that sort of a job may be a little more liberal in general, right? The media is all about protecting democracy and looking up for the voiceless, right? To give a voice to the voiceless or to really help people overcome their obstacles and hurdles to let them rise up to their ability. And so, by its very nature, it probably attracts people who may be more liberal. So, again the question is ‘Is there any evidence that there is any liberal political bias in the media?’ I don’t think there’s evidence that exists. Could I
envision a situation where accidental bias could enter in and collectively look like bias? I could see that happening, but I don’t think that it’s on purpose and I think they try to avoid that as much as possible.” (Appendix B).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patti Piburn</td>
<td>“Just in that pool that we're looking at—should we cover this? So, then we select from that pool. So, I think there's bias right out of the gate.”</td>
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<td>Richard Gearhart</td>
<td>“I don’t think you can isolate the perception of bias and trust.”</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

3. How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?

This question is entirely dependent upon if the respondent believes media bias exists. However, this question is quite important nevertheless, as it introduces an important aspect of media bias—the public. The public, as news consumers, depend on the media to provide objective news, which is negatively affected if there is a perception that the news they consume is, in fact, biased.

• **Patti Piburn**: “I'm sure it does. I think one way you can look at how bias might affect media content is just in story selection. So just to think about what, in the story selection process, what gets pitched. Reporters come into the newsroom with ideas of stories they want to cover. News managers have ideas about the stories they want to cover. Assignment desk editors have ideas. Everyone's bringing in these things that they believe are important. So, there's an inherent bias in just what is even being suggested to go into
the news cycle. We're not going to pitch things we don't like or we don't think are important. So, we're not going to discuss those things. So, already there's some bias at play. Just in that pool that we're looking at- should we cover this? So, then we select from that pool. So, I think there's bias right out of the gate.” (Appendix A).

- Richard Gearhart: “Well, I don’t think you can isolate the perception of bias and trust. I don’t you can correlate those two directly. So, in other words, there is so much more that goes into whether or not people trust the media than just the perception of political bias. Remember we haven't agreed yet that there is political bias so I'm saying that can I envision where some people would perceive bias? Yes, I can envision that happening. But, I would say that that's just one element that leads to trust in the media and then of course I would say that if there is this general perception of liberal bias in the media, then of course the trust issue would come from those who are less liberal in their viewpoint.” (Appendix B).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Patti Piburn</td>
<td>“So, I don't think the large majority of journalists go into this line of work with an agenda... And so, I think a lot of it is absolutely unintentional.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Gearhart</td>
<td>“I think that it is each individual reporter’s responsibilities and I think this is part of being an ethical journalist- to remove as much personal bias as possible.”</td>
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<td>Randol White</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>
4. Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?

This question is designed to separate the political bias that may seep into coverage due to unavoidable personal biases and intentional bias due to the political leaning of an organization. If the participant answered the former, then the question necessarily becomes: how can we minimize such biases? If the answer is the latter, then the question becomes: how does this affect objectivity?

• Patti Piburn: “Often times, I think so. I think people who go into the news business, I think they generally go into journalism because they have some ideals and they have some ideas about this, you know, sort of a public service that they want to do. So, I don't think the large majority of journalists go into this line of work with an agenda. They usually go in because they think that they're going to do good, do good work, in the name of you know serving the public. And so, I think a lot of it is absolutely unintentional. It's not necessarily done by journalists on the ground who are saying to themselves, ‘I have a mission. Today, I'm going to accomplish this.’ But I do think that happens at a higher-level.” (Appendix A).

• Richard Gearhart: “I think that it is each individual reporter’s responsibilities and I think this is part of being an ethical journalist- to remove as much personal bias as possible. But the other side of me thinks that that is not 100% possible. I don't think that it is possible to eliminate all of your personal biases, no matter how hard you try. But having said that, I think that you can get awfully close to removing bias, but that takes actual, honest effort from each individual in the media. You know, when I look at my job as a journalist there are multiple aspects to my job as a journalist but one of those is to
remove as much personal bias as possible. It's really to the point where I can accept what
the potential bias is and to try to actively overcome that. And I think that maybe teaching
that, reminding people of that, having continuing education requirements to sort of
reinstill that. I think that that could all lead to a system where there would be less bias.
And also, I think honestly, I think you hit the nail on the head where to a certain extent
that, if there is a perception, and I don't know if there is, but if there is a perception that
the media is biased politically, then it doesn't really matter if they are or they're not
because perception is reality. So that's really a public relations mantra, right? If you have
a perception problem, you have a problem whether a problem exists or not. So, if there is
that perception, then I think that it's our responsibility as individual members of the
media to overcome that perception issue.” (Appendix B).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
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5. If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or
profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?

This question specifically aims at certain news organizations like Fox News and the
Huffington Post, whose audience flock to them for their slanted news coverage. However, if this
is so, then how can they influence other, more objective, news organizations if all of the media companies are lumped together under the general category of “the media”, which may be problematic for other companies which prize their objectivity.

• Patti Piburn: “I think they affect public perception in what they're putting out, right? I think there are a lot of people sitting in living rooms that are either watching TV or, if they're in their cars, listening to this content on the radio, who are influenced by what they're hearing. They oftentimes don't question what they're hearing. They believe it; they hear it and it has an impact on them. It influences decisions that they make. If you're asking me does it- So, I think it affects people in that way. If you're asking does it affect people in the sense that they don't like the media or they think the media is doing a bad job, I think there is a degree of that where there are people who- If we kind of look back in time to when it was Dan Rather, when it was Cronkite, you know, some of the very trusted news faces that people would come home every night and turn on CBS or turn on NBC and these were the people that they trusted to tell them about the world. We're in a different place now, for sure. I think that a large part of the audience realizes that these media companies have to make money and making money that they have to sell a product.” (Appendix A).

• Richard Gearhart: “I don't know if there's an overall perception. I think that we're seeing that more and more in broadcast now. But, realistically we've always seen that in newspapers, right? There has always been more conservative newspapers and more liberal newspapers and newspapers in general will come out with political recommendation and political stances during political seasons. But then there are also those newspapers that work actively to portray themselves as non political or as general
newspapers and less biased newspapers. And I don't know that I would 100% agree with you that everybody would say that one of those organizations is liberal and I don't know if they would even describe themselves as actively as you are saying. But if indeed they are, I think that probably that helps to build trust. So, if somebody were to have a political leaning or taking political stance and actually say it, then I think that actually builds trust because then, if an organization were to do that and you were watching that organization, you know where they're coming from.” (Appendix B).

• Randol White: “Great reporting is either free of bias or extremely transparent about any potential conflict. Organizations that masquerade their biased reports as "news" do not better the industry as a whole. It's getting harder for some viewers/listeners to distinguish between entertainment and news, which is problematic.” (Appendix C).

Table 6

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6. What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?
This general question is intended to round up the interviews as well to get the general recommendations from each of the media professionals. This will then be used a foundation for the recommendations made in Chapter 5.

- **Patti Piburn**: “I almost feel like they have to throw out the advertising if they were really going to do that. But even when you look at forms of public media, whether it's National Public Radio or public broadcasting, someone is still paying for that content. So, if you are going to attract sponsors to provide underwriting, you still have to create a product that is appealing to first, an audience, and then after you assemble that audience, then that audience needs to be appealing to those sponsors, to those underwriters, or in a commercial environment to those advertisers. So, it's really hard to have a journalism model because journalism obviously has to be sustained in someway that's free of influence from some sort of outside pressures; some outside source. So, it's really hard to imagine a journalism model that would be successful.” (Appendix A).

- **Richard Gearhart**: “And so, I think that if newspapers or really any journalist would actively say this is the potential bias here and how do we overcome it or this could be viewed as bias is and how do we overcome it. I mean, I don't think they have to come out and do disclaimers of the top, but if they were a little bit more open about where there is potential for bias and how they're overcoming that potential for bias I think that would help to go a long way toward fixing that problem.” (Appendix B).

- **Randol White**: “Transparency is KEY in gaining trust. If media outlets can stick with reporting factual information and exposing any potential conflict of bias in that process, then I believe that would go a long way in developing public trust.” (Appendix C).
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

It is important to note that this study about media bias was done as a response to a concept popular among conservative circles and perhaps the general public- the “mainstream” media is liberal and biased. However true this sentiment may be to some, there has been few studies done to try and gauge how biased the media truly is, if in fact, it is. More importantly, while study after study was accomplished to identify the fundamental problems associated with a biased media, few studies have attempted to fix this problem with comprehensive recommendations. To that end, this study provides recommendations based on how the media professionals interviewed responded in the interviews. Specifically, three media professionals were interviewed to better define how and where the general perceptions of the media define the actual function of the media. Each media professional was asked the same set of questions about media bias:

1. What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?
2. If there is substantiating bias, then how does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?
3. How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?
4. Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?
5. If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?
6. What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?
Each participant was encouraged to answer each question to the best of their ability, although they were not coerced or guided toward any particular answer. There are some derivations among the questions asked due to the differences in the answers given as well as follow-up questions to clarify specific answers.

**Discussion**

Once the data has been collected, the information from the interviews as well as the information found in Chapter 2 from other related studies can be disseminated and compared in order to get the general gist of the different perspectives of the media professionals involved in the study.

**Research Question #1: What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?**

The three different experts have three different opinions in whether the media is biased. Piburn stated that evidence can probably be found in favor of there being media bias. Gearhart believes that the media isn’t biased and that there isn’t substantiating proof while White believes the term “media” is far to large and generalized to be subjected to a simple answer, instead refraining from answering the question.

The literature not only reflects, but found evidence supporting Piburn’s position. “Our results show a strong liberal bias. All of the news outlets except Fox News’ Special Report and the Washington Times received a score to the left of the average member of Congress” (Grosclose & Milyo, 2005, p. 1192). “Our first set of results show that firms will tend to distort information to make it conform with consumers’ prior beliefs” (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006, p. 282).
Based on the three answers alone, there isn’t a consensus among media professionals as to whether bias exists or not. However, the literature seems to suggest otherwise, claiming that bias does in fact exist.

**Research Question #2: If there is substantiating bias, then how does the bias affect one political affiliation more than another?**

Piburn and White both refrained from answering this question, as either it was irrelevant or the participant admitted she did not have any examples available to recite. However, Gearhart believes that the media is, by its very nature, more liberal than the average news consumer. He believes this may be, in large part, due to how journalists see themselves. He said, “The media is all about protecting democracy and looking up for the voiceless, right? To give a voice to the voiceless or to really help people overcome their obstacles and hurdles to let them rise up to their ability. And so, by its very nature, it probably attracts people who may be more liberal.” So, it may not be that journalists have an intentional liberal bias, but how they see themselves in a functioning democracy that may contribute to a perception of liberal bias.

**Research Question #3: How does this bias affect public perception and trust in the media?**

White didn’t answer this question as it was irrelevant to his views on bias. However, Piburn and Gearhart believes that perception of the media as a biased entity is unacceptable. Piburn said that she thinks certain consumers flock to intentionally biased or slanted news organizations: “I would say, depending on who is viewing- who's consuming that content and what their perceptions are- they may agree with the slant of the news organization that they're consuming content from. So, it may not be noticeable to them. It's like preacher-choir. You know, they're all on the same page.”
Gearhart stated that, even if the media isn’t biased, if there is a perception of bias, then it must be corrected: “If you have a perception problem, you have a problem whether a problem exists or not. So, if there is that perception, then I think that it’s our responsibility as individual members of the media to overcome that perception issue.”

**Research Question #4: Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?**

White didn’t answer this question as it was irrelevant to his views on bias. However, Piburn and Gearhart agreed that media bias isn’t intentional. It is just a product of journalists’ personal convictions. Piburn said, “I think people who go into the news business, I think they generally go into journalism because they have some ideals and they have some ideas about this, you know, sort of a public service that they want to do. So, I don't think the large majority of journalists go into this line of work with an agenda.” Gearhart goes on further to say how, although the personal biases inherent to every journalist can’t be removed, that isn’t to say media practitioners should attempt to minimize such biases. As he said, “I don't think that it is possible to eliminate all of your personal biases, no matter how hard you try. But having said that, I think that you can get awfully close to removing bias, but that takes actual, honest effort from each individual in the media.”

**Research Question #5: If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?**

All three media experts agreed that the actions certain media companies take to portray themselves as objective despite their often heavily slanted news coverages affects the media negatively. Piburn claims that ultimately, news organizations are profit-driven. “I think that a
large part of the audience realizes that these media companies have to make money and making money that they have to sell a product.” White agrees and claims that news organizations’ actions affect each other in a tightly-knit body. As he put it, “Organizations that masquerade their biased reports as "news" do not better the industry as a whole.”

**Research Question #6: What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?**

The three participants each provided reasonable recommendations in order for the media to recover the trust of the public. Piburn stated that the media “ha[s] to throw out the advertising if they were really going to do that… So, it's really hard to have a journalism model because journalism obviously has to be sustained in someway that's free of influence from some sort of outside pressures; some outside source.” Gearhart believes that journalists and organizations should try harder to appear more transparent to their respective publics: “I mean, I don't think they have to come out and do disclaimers of the top, but if they were a little bit more open about where there is potential for bias and how they're overcoming that potential for bias I think that would help to go a long way toward fixing that problem.” White argues that the media should continue to monitor and exude objectivity whenever possible. He said, “If media outlets can stick with reporting factual information and exposing any potential conflict of bias in that process, then I believe that would go a long way in developing public trust.”

**Recommendations for Practice**

After compiling the data and answers, the recommendations that should be implemented by the media in general if it is to recover from a damaging perception of bias are as follows: it should reduce the influence of advertisements on media coverage, appear more transparent to the
publics it is serving, and maintain the current process of facilitating objectivity in news coverage. If the recommendations are followed, the media will shed its image as biased towards one political side.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while this study attempts to provide a comprehensive background of the problem of media bias as well as recommendations on how to fix it, one must be quick to realize how limited in scope such a study can be due to the limitations imposed on the study. More academic studies should be conducted to ascertain a definitive answer on the question of media bias—whether such bias indeed exists—as well as find more recommendations that can help to remedy this potential problem. Overall, the study done was based on the opinions of three media professionals, and can therefore be subjective. However, subjectivity does not hinder the approach taken by this study. In fact, the subjective, yet informative, opinions presented in the interviews help to formulate a general idea of the multi-faceted approach media organizations must take to tackle this problem, which may well cut into their profits. This study attempts to provide such a multi-faceted approach, however elementary it may be. With these recommendations, news organizations should once again be regarded in high esteem like those of the Cronkite-era.
References


Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Patti Piburn

The following interview was done so as to get a media professional’s opinions on media bias and how it affects coverage.

Interviewer: Daniel Park
Respondent: KCBX News Anchor (Patti Piburn)
Date of Interview: 3/9/2016

Interview Transcription:

Daniel Park: “First of all, do I have your permission to record it and later transcribe it?”

Patti Piburn: “Yes, you do.”

DP: “So, professor, my first question is: what, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?”

PP: “Substantiating evidence?”

DP: “Yes, do you believe that there's evidence to support the claim that the media is politically biased; in favor of one political side over another?”

PP: “I think that evidence could be found. I don't have any examples off the top of my head. But I think if you did any examination of either Fox or MSNBC, and probably at times CNN, even though they to stay in the middle, I'm sure you could find it. I can't think of an example for you at the moment.”

DP: “So, do you think that journalism students and journalism reporters, when they go into the field and report for an organization- do you believe that they bring in their own personal biases towards reporting?”

PP: “I do think that they do. I think everyone does. We all do. What I try to tell my students is to be self-aware, to self-examine, and to be aware of what their preferences might be; what their biases might be. What they may like or dislike, you know, because of their background; because of their family; because of their history. So, I don't think we can eliminate our biases, but I think, as reporters, if we are cognizant of them and work really hard in spite of what your leanings might be- I think that's the best we can do.”

DP: “So, let's talk about this bias, whether it's intentional or unintentional. Do you believe that this bias affects public perception because of that trust in the media?”
PP: “I’m sure it does. I think one way you can look at how bias might affect media content is just in story selection. So just to think about what, in the story selection process, what gets pitched. Reporters come into the newsroom with ideas of stories they want to cover. News managers have ideas about the stories they want to cover. Assignment desk editors have ideas. Everyone’s bringing in these things that they believe are important. So, there’s an inherent bias in just what is even being suggested to go into the news cycle. We're not going to pitch things we don't like or we don't think are important. So, we're not going to discuss those things. So, already there's some bias at play. Just in that pool that we're looking at - should we cover this? So, then we select from that pool. So, I think there’s bias right out of the gate. Just in that selection of what we think is important to put into the news cycle. How it might affect viewers? Again, I'm sure that's measurable. I'm sure someone could do some research and I'm sure research is being done on that. I would say, depending on who is viewing - who's consuming that content and what their perceptions are - they may agree with the slant of the news organization that they're consuming content from. So, it may not be noticeable to them. It's like preacher-choir. You know, they're all on the same page. If it goes against what they believe, then perhaps it will rub them the wrong way and they may fault the news organization as being not credible or not doing a good job or presenting an agenda. Think it kind of depends on who the viewers is or who the consumer is.”

DP: “Is the bias an intentional act, do you believe? Do you believe that some of it is intentional?”

PP: “I think it's can be. I think it definitely can be. I think a lot of times at a small level, reporters and local newsrooms, I think, are exercising biased that they may very well not be aware of. They may be making choices and decisions that are very unintentional. They may contain bias but they may not be cognizant of that. But there is another level where we're getting to a higher level of corporate decision-making about content and about the way content is presented, and I do think that there can be agendas behind that - very intentional agendas. Have you seen the documentary - I think it's called Foxified - it's about Fox News. It's about five to ten years old, I think at least. But it does get into some memos that the documentary maker had access to from Roger Ailes who put out an agenda to his news managers to have a certain slant; a certain direction that he wanted them to go; a certain language that he wanted them to use or they might have been framed as buzzwords. So, I do think that, yes, at a corporate level, at a managerial level, there are certainly times when intentional decisions are made to shape content in a political direction.”

DP: “So, you believe then that while some of the it may be intentional bias, for the large part, it's an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives.”

PP: “Often times, I think so. I think people who go into the news business, I think they generally go into journalism because they have some ideals and they have some ideas about this, you know, sort of a public service that they want to do. So, I don't think the large majority of journalists go into this line of work with an agenda. They usually go in because they think that they're going to do good, do good work, in the name of you know serving the public. And so, I think a lot of it is absolutely unintentional. It's not necessarily done by journalists on the ground who are saying to themselves, ‘I have a mission. Today, I'm going to accomplish this.’ But I do think that happens at a higher-level.”
DP: “So, if an organization does have intentional bias, like Fox and MSNBC and sometimes
CNN, as you've said and plays that bias for better ratings or for a specific audience or whatever it
may be. Do those actions by those individual media corporations, do they affect the perception of
the media as a whole?”

PP: “I think they affect public perception in what they're putting out, right? I think there are a lot
of people sitting in living rooms that are either watching TV or, if they're in their cars, listening
to this content on the radio, who are influenced by what they're hearing. They oftentimes don't
question what they're hearing. They believe it; they hear it and it has an impact on them. It
influences decisions that they make. If you're asking me does it- So, I think it affects people in
that way. If you're asking does it affect people in the sense that they don't like the media or they
think the media is doing a bad job, I think there is a degree of that where there are people who-
If we kind of look back in time to when it was Dan Rather, when it was Cronkite, you know, some
of the very trusted news faces that people would come home every night and turn on CBS or turn
on NBC and these were the people that they trusted to tell them about the world. We're in a
different place now, for sure. I think that a large part of the audience realizes that these media
companies have to make money and making money that they have to sell a product. They have to
appeal to advertisers and they have to wrap that product up in an appealing way that will entice
people to consume it. So, I do think that the audience is pretty savvy in assessing that the media,
in saying the media news isn't always just to inform you. A lot times, it's about selling consumer
products. And I do think there's a level of awareness among people about that and I do think that
people are critical of these organizations. Does that answer your question?”

DP: “Yes. What steps do you think the media should take to recover the general trust of the
public?”

PP: “I almost feel like they have to throw out the advertising if they were really going to do that.
But even when you look at forms of public media, whether it's National Public Radio or public
broadcasting, someone is still paying for that content. So, if you are going to attract sponsors to
provide underwriting, you still have to create a product that is appealing to first, an audience, and
then after you assemble that audience, then that audience needs to be appealing to those
sponsors, to those underwriters, or in a commercial environment to those advertisers. So, it's
really hard to have a journalism model because journalism obviously has to be sustained in
someway that's free of influence from some sort of outside pressures; some outside source. So,
it's really hard to imagine a journalism model that would be successful. That would be free of
influence. That could regain public trust. That that organization wasn't being driven by some
agenda in someway because, if you think about it, every organization is driven by at least at the
bare minimum the agenda of making money. They have to pay to do this, right? Something has
to support it. So, somehow they have to make money and that is obviously going to influence
what they're doing.”

DP: “But that's not going to happen any time soon.”

PP: “No. Way back in the day, in early, early ages of television, the news product was not
expected to make money. It was a trade-off that broadcasters had to provide this public service of
providing information. And they weren't expected to make a profit off of it. It was what they owed to their audience. So, that was a more pure model of journalism than what we have right now.”

DP: “So, what steps should the media take to prevent unfair bias from seeping into coverage?”

PP: “Well, they should try as hard as they can to stop it. I don't if there's a way. What steps could they take? I think everyone has to be really honest, first with themselves, and then with the organization that they work for about what their biases may be, what their interests are. What organizations do they belong to? You really have to examine your history or background, sort of your personal history, to really get a grip on what your preferences might be. I think that's a step in the right direction. I think they really need to look at their advertising and how the news part of the organization works with the business side of the organization to make sure that there is not undue pressure from the business side to have a certain slant and conversely, sometimes, you'll find people who very innocently suggest on the news side of things, like, "Hey, we could do this for this organization. We could do this story." Thinking that's like a win-win for everyone, but I still think that's a form of bias at work if you're going to report on an event, an issue, an organization because it would be good for everyone because your news organization has a relationship with that organization. It sounds all positive for everyone involved, but still it is a form of influence over your news product, even if all the intentions are good and noble, if that makes sense. So, I think if they want to take steps towards freeing themselves from bias, I think it's just to be really upfront and honest with what those biases might be, what those influences might be.”

DP: “That is it for the interview. Is there anything you would like to add, professor, before this interview is over?”

PP: “Just that I have worked for news organizations where I've certainly seen examples of bias that may be fairly innocent and not intentional. It's just people not really realizing what they're personal beliefs are and how that might be influencing the decisions that they make when it comes to news. But I've also worked for places where we have certainly felt outright pressure from the business and the advertising side of the organization to do or do not do certain types of coverage. It's clearly stated: we either want you to do this story because this is a client or we want you to stop doing that story because this is a client. So, that's very clear. there's no question about that kind of bias and I've seen both forms.”
Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Richard Gearhart

The following interview was done so as to get a media professional’s opinions on media bias and how it affects coverage. This was done during his office hours.

Interviewer: Daniel Park
Respondent: KSBY News Anchor (Richard Gearhart)
Date of Interview: 3/9/2016

Interview Transcription:

Daniel Park: “Do you think that there’s any evidence that the media is politically biased?”

Richard Gearhart: “Substantiating evidence? I don’t think there is substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased. I think that it would be impossible for every reporter and every media outlet to not have some personal bias. I don’t think you could eliminate all personal bias altogether and I guess I would argue that probably a certain type of person is attracted to the job of being in the media. So, I guess you could argue that there’s the potential for accidental bias, but I don’t think there would be any evidence of actual…evidence that you could substantiate that would actually indicate political bias.”

DP: “Okay. So, you don’t believe that there’s any substantiating bias towards political motives or something like that in the media?”

RG: “Well, I guess I see it as two different questions. Do I think that the media, in itself as an entity, is biased politically? And, is there evidence to support that? I would say that you could not find evidence to support that, I don’t think. Does there exist the possibility that accidental bias, or the personal bias can come in as a result of individual employees or personal beliefs? I would argue that it would be impossible for every single employee not to bring some bias into their reporting because I think its impossible to remove all bias in general. So, could I envision a situation in which there would be accidental bias introduced and compounded by the fact that there are multiple people involved in a newscast? Yes, but I think that, you know what the population tries to or would like to argue is that, as a whole or as an individual entity, a media outlet or the media in general is politically biased or has an agenda and I don’t think that’s the case. I would say that you can’t say that they are completely neutral and unbiased because I don’t think anybody is, but I don’t think that there is…I don’t think that it’s over biased trying to lead to changing the political situation in America or the world.”

DP: “So, you don’t think that the personal biases often…political or whatever…don’t you think that it affects one political spectrum more than the other? Like the accusations that the media has a liberal bias and things of that nature. Do you think that is solely because of biases that people can’t help?”
RG: “Yeah, but I guess my point is- and you have to be careful how you say this. And that’s why I’m trying to be really careful on how I say this. Again, what I would say is that those people who are attracted to working in the media; if you were to generalize the kind of personality that would be attracted to working in the media or would aspire to get that sort of a job may be a little more liberal in general, right? The media is all about protecting democracy and looking up for the voiceless, right? To give a voice to the voiceless or to really help people overcome their obstacles and hurdles to let them rise up to their ability. And so, by its very nature, it probably attracts people who may be more liberal. So, again the question is ‘Is there any evidence that there is any liberal political bias in the media?’ I don’t think there’s evidence that exists. Could I envision a situation where accidental bias could enter in and collectively look like bias? I could see that happening, but I don’t think that it’s on purpose and I think they try to avoid that as much as possible.”

DP: “How do you think that the perception of media bias- how do you think that affects public trust when it comes to how they perceive the media and whether or not they trust the media?”

RG: “Well, I don’t think you can isolate the perception of bias and trust. I don’t you can correlate those two directly. So, in other words, there is so much more that goes into whether or not people trust the media than just the perception of political bias. Remember we haven't agreed yet that there is political bias so I'm saying that can I envision where some people would perceive bias? Yes, I can envision that happening. But, I would say that that's just one element that leads to trust in the media and then of course I would say that if there is this general perception of liberal bias in the media, then of course the trust issue would come from those who are less liberal in their viewpoint.”

DP: “So you state then that the biases that reporters and journalists kind of bring into the organization is for the most part unintentional and for the most part it's just their personal biases that can affect how they cover a story. Do you think that it's possible to change that? Do you think that there's a unified way to sort of bring people and focus their viewpoint towards a specific sort of objectivity?”

RG: “I think that it is each individual reporter’s responsibilities and I think this is part of being an ethical journalist- to remove as much personal bias as possible. But the other side of me thinks that that is not 100% possible. I don't think that it is possible to eliminate all of your personal biases, no matter how hard you try. But having said that, I think that you can get awfully close to removing bias, but that takes actual, honest effort from each individual in the media. You know, when I look at my job as a journalist there are multiple aspects to my job as a journalist but one of those is to remove as much personal bias as possible. It's really to the point where I can accept what the potential bias is and to try to actively overcome that. And I think that maybe teaching that, reminding people of that, having continuing education requirements to sort of reinstill that. I think that that could all lead to a system where there would be less bias. And also, I think honestly, I think you hit the nail on the head where to a certain extent that, if there is a perception, and I don't know if there is, but if there is a perception that the media is biased politically, then it doesn't really matter if they are or they're not because perception is reality. So that's really a public relations mantra, right? If you have a perception problem, you have a
problem whether a problem exists or not. So, if there is that perception, then I think that it's our responsibility as individual members of the media to overcome that perception issue.”

DP: “So, certain news organizations have portrayed themselves specifically towards one political aisle or another, like MSNBC and Fox News or something like that, who actively portray a specific political viewpoint and therefore destroy the notion of objectivity. They claim that their actions only affect their organization, but do you see this sort of play out towards the media as a whole? That certain organizations like The Huffington Post or MSNBC, which is actively well known for its liberal viewpoint; do you think that perpetuates the perception that the media is biased?”

RG: “I don't know if there's an overall perception. I think that we're seeing that more and more in broadcast now. But, realistically we've always seen that in newspapers, right? There has always been more conservative newspapers and more liberal newspapers and newspapers in general will come out with political recommendation and political stances during political seasons. But then there are also those newspapers that work actively to portray themselves as non political or as general newspapers and less biased newspapers. And I don't know that I would 100% agree with you that everybody would say that one of those organizations is liberal and I don't know if they would even describe themselves as actively as you are saying. But if indeed they are, I think that probably helps to build trust. So, if somebody were to have a political leaning or taking political stance and actually say it, then I think that actually builds trust because then, if an organization were to do that and you were watching that organization, you know where they're coming from. I think the bigger potential is for those organization who are claiming that they don't but then have a perception that they are, right? And again that goes back to what my statement was originally, which is overcoming bias really starts with admitting that you have the potential for bias and overcoming it.”

DP: “Let's talk about the newspapers for a second because I think it's still to the point. There are some newspapers that endorse a candidate. But let's talk about some organizations that try to portray themselves as objective. Some newspapers try to portray themselves objectively like the New York Times and things of that nature. But some would say that while the articles may seem objective, the editorials certainly isn’t as objective…”

RG: “But that's true of a newspaper isn't it. They make a clear and distinct line between editorial content and news content.”

DP: “But don't you think that that sort of sharp separation between news articles and editorials; do you think that it can sometimes be blurred? So, some organizations that try to be objective or seem to be objective our kind of influence by the editorials.”

RG: “I don't know and I don't know if that's the perception. I really don't know the answer to that. I would say that from a media perspective or from somebody from the inside, that one of the reasons why they draw a sharp and distinct line between their op-ed or opinion editorial section and those staff members and the rest of their news organization. And really those people that are involved aren't supposed to be sharing information with one another. Like the editorial and opinion staff is separate from the new staff, which is separate from the advertising staff on
purpose in newspapers so that there isn't a crossover. So that there isn't even a perception of that crossover. But clearly, if all of your opinion and editorial staff is leaning one way, then I can see that. I wouldn't make the statement and I don't agree with the statement that that does make the newspaper lean that way or makes the newspaper unobjective, but I can certainly see where the perception would come in.”

DP: “What steps should the media take to recover from this perception of media bias?”

RG: “You know I kind of liken it to class. I liken it to doing research papers. So, when you do a higher-level research paper like you're doing a thesis paper or doing a dissertation, one of the things that you have to do at the beginning of that paper is to sort of say, is to admit openly, overtly, what are the potential pitfalls here or what are the potential perception issues, what are the potential biases in this study. And so, I think that if newspapers or really any journalist would actively say this is the potential bias here and how do we overcome it or this could be viewed as bias is and how do we overcome it. I mean, I don't think they have to come out and do disclaimers of the top, but if they were a little bit more open about where there is potential for bias and how they're overcoming that potential for bias I think that would help to go a long way toward fixing that problem.”

DP: “So, this goes back to the question of personal biases and things of that nature. What steps do you think the media could take to prevent unfair bias, and the key word here is unfair, from seeping into stories that should be objective?”

RG: “Well, I would say that all bias is unfair bias, right? Especially in news coverage. There shouldn't be any bias entering in at all. So, what steps should they take. Again, I think a lot of it is like education and then a lot of it is sharing what they're doing and how they're trying to make sure that objectivity exists with their readers or viewers or their consumers of the news product, if you want to put it that way. Again, I think really what we have to do is just be a little bit more open about how there is the potential for bias whether it exists or not. What they are doing to overcome that; what they're doing to train their staff members to make sure that that isn't entering in; what steps they have in the editorial process. What I mean by the editorial process is- I'm not talking about opinion editorial. I'm talking about editors who are overlooking the stories and letting people know that it's going passed more than one person. That the story is being reviewed and approved by more than one person. So, I think that if we were a bit more overt about what we were doing to make sure that objectivity exist in stories I think that would help build trust and get away from the perception that there's bias.”

DP: “Is there anything you would like to add, professor?”

RG: “I would just say that, honestly I would say that in my mind there isn't as much bias as there is perception of bias, but then I would still make that point one more time. But in a sense, it doesn't matter because perception is reality.”
Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Randol White

The following interview was done so as to get a media professional’s opinions on media bias and how it affects coverage. This interview was different from the other two- Mr. White was unavailable for a face-to-face interview. Therefore, it was decided that an email correspondence was the best plan available.

Interviewer: Daniel Park
Respondent: KCBX Managing News Director (Randol White)
Date of Interview: 3/9/2016

Interview Transcription:

Daniel Park: What, if any, is the substantiating evidence that the media is politically biased?

Randol White: “The media” is too broadly based to answer this question with any degree of accuracy. Are some individual media outlets biased? My answer would be, yes. Is “the media” as a whole biased? There are nearly as many political representations in the media as there are possible positions. My perspective is that—in most cases—people know what those are and gravitate toward the outlets they're most comfortable with politically, and in some cases, that means embracing those with a neutral stance.

DP: Is the bias an intentional action by individual reporters or organizations, or is it an inadvertent consequence of personal opinions and perspectives?

RW: Certain outlets (Fox, MSNBC, New York Times, Wall Street Journal) are well known for their political leanings. The media consumer typically knows these biases and takes in the information through that lens.

Other organizations (ABC, CBS, NPR, CNN, Al Jazeera) work to maintain neutrality, despite what some on the left and right might say about them.

I know people who have and do work for many of the above organizations and their individual leanings don't always represent those of the greater organization. I know a few left-leaning men who work for Fox, and I have an extremely Republican friend who works in San Francisco for an organization that some would say leans left.

Never in any of my experiences in network affiliate-based newsrooms have I ever felt pressure to present a story with a political bend. I've always found it funny when I hear either side of the spectrum screaming out about bias in "the media", when—as in insider—I have simply not witnessed this in practice.

Where it does exist, it's not only known, it's almost used as a marketing tool by the organization (Fox, MSNBC).
DP: If an organization has intentional bias and plays that bias for better ratings or profits, do those actions affect the media as a whole?

RW: Great reporting is either free of bias or extremely transparent about any potential conflict. Organizations that masquerade their biased reports as "news" do not better the industry as a whole. It's getting harder for some viewers/listeners to distinguish between entertainment and news, which is problematic.

DP: What steps should the media take to recover the general trust of the public?

RW: Transparency is KEY in gaining trust. If media outlets can stick with reporting factual information and exposing any potential conflict of bias in that process, then I believe that would go a long way in developing public trust.

DP: What steps should the media take to prevent unfair bias from seeping back into coverage?

RW: I don't believe there is an overall "the media" approach to this issues, it has to be tackled by each individual outlet that strives for providing neutral coverage. Tools to ensure a more balanced approach to news gathering and reporting would include:

- Maintaining a culturally, ethnically and gender diverse newsroom at all levels of the employment hierarchy
- Maintaining a solid checklist for verifying the facts of a story
- "Code of Integrity" guidelines that are referenced and utilized by the newsroom's editorial staff
- Using a "pre-edit" system for determining any potential bias (political or otherwise) on the part of a reporter during the story development process.