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Update: the social responsibility of the press

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Update: The Social Responsibility of the Press

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of
Journalism and Mass Communications
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

by

Stephen Vold

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ABSTRACT

Update: The Social Responsibility of the Press

Stephen Vold

This thesis study examined two newspapers, one large and one small, to see if the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press was a viable theory and part of the day to day decision-making function of newsmen in today's mass media.

The writer also consulted with two mass communications professors who are experts in their field, for their reactions to the viability of the theory.

All 10 interviews were conducted by phone at various times during 1998-99.

The study revealed that the theory is relevant to today's mass communication market and discerned a basic knowledge of Social Responsibility on the part of all newsmen interviewed, be they editor or reporter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	Introduction and Rationale	Page	1
Chapter II	Literature Review	Page	8
Chapter III	Method	Page	71
Chapter IV	Results/Findings	Page	78
Chapter V	Summary	Page	100
References		Page	112
Appendix		Page	115

Chapter I

Introduction and Rationale

This introduction consists of a brief overview of the current state of the press, as it relates to Social Responsibility Theory. This introduction also consists of a statement concerning the purpose of study, what is being studied and why, who is likely to benefit from the study and how, and how the study is better, or different, than other previous studies. Finally, this introduction contains a problem statement, a formal statement of questions and subquestions, definition of terms, and a statement of the hypotheses.

State of the Press

Today the press faces many challenges from within and from without. The latest Gallup polls reveal press credibility at 13.7 percent (Christians, Fachler, & Rotzoll, 1995), the lowest figure in decades. In July of this year ABC News commented on the "Valley of Death" story that was broadcast by CNN and published as an article by Time magazine and turned out to be false. In response to this non-factual story of nerve gas being used on U.S. troops in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, ABC News said, "What's behind the mistakes in policy of recent stories? It's causing soul-searching in newsrooms around the country. Although CNN and Time retracted the story, increased pressure and decreased standards appear to be the norm." ABC went on to say the ratings, money, and fame play a role in the recent deluge of false or

inaccurate stories. ABC said, "No longer is there any patience in the media. The pressures are on everybody and no one stands up and says 'It's wrong'." Most importantly, ABC broadcasted that (the press) needs to take themselves more responsibly and with more responsibility.

The Social Responsibility of the Press, evolved from the founding fathers and Libertarian theory, is a theory which can help the press as it gropes through difficult times. The Social Responsibility of the Press is a six tenet theory which gives the press guidelines as to what should be published, how information should be published, and how to ensure that a press outlet remain economically viable. In this era of public dissatisfaction with the press, it is prudent to ask if the press is aware of the Theory and whether or not they use its guidelines in their everyday decision-making.

Bagdikian (1992) warned about the consolidation of the press into a few major corporations. Today, despite more than 25,000 outlets in the United States, twenty-three corporations control most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books, and motion pictures. Bagdikian wrote that an alarming pattern has emerged. Clearly power now lies in the hands of a few at the peril of many.

When a corporation buys a local monopoly or market domination, few can resist the spectacular profits that can be made by cutting quality and raising prices. Advertising takes on an entire new perspective when a corporation enters a heretofore small or competitive market. The common control of different media makes those media more alike than ever.

What can one do about changes in coverage--what types of issues for what groups of people? What can Social Responsibility Theory do for the changes or differences in press performance? What results from following or not following social Responsibility Theory? Are gatekeepers aware of theory and can advertising, audience and reader numbers determine to what extent topics are handled by the press? And what should those topics be, sensationalistic or mundane?

The coverage of Princess Diana of England before and after her death evokes many questions. How hungry is the press for intimate details? The case of the President and Monica Lewensky is another concerning example of press performance--as is even the coverage of El Nino weather patterns. Editors are in a position to determine what the public does or does not read. The theory of the Social Responsibility of the Press with its emphasis on responsibility can be a primer in this area.

The jailing and hanging of writers no longer occurs at the whim of a monarch. Yet many contemporary restrictions are nonetheless called censorship. Whether it be in the form of government, or censorship from within the press organization such as advertising pressures, the muzzling of the press is indeed an issue which requires thoughtful consideration. Are thoughts all equally worthy of protection? Are there no ideas unfit for expression, whether they be insane, obscene, or destructive?

Violence, although primarily a concern for television and film, nevertheless plays a role in the values of the press. How much coverage and what types of coverage, where to play it and for how long, a question the press

need to ask themselves. A sense of social responsibility can help here. Against the censors of violence are combat-hardened libertarians who want all speech protected. Questions of good taste when it comes to the objectionable must be considered. What the people in the press do with these questions is in large part the backbone of the Social Responsibility theory of the media.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to see how inclusive Social Responsibility theory is in the day to day thinking of the press. To what degree are the six tenets of the theory followed or ignored? Is it merely jargon learned in Journalism school? The theory is being studied in order to better aid the editors who must make decisions which affect the reader, the advertiser--all of the public. Editors who are aware of the Social Responsibility Theory of the media will benefit more from this study, as they make the decisions which truly effect the content of their product, for good or bad. Editors, like everyone else, need to be reminded from time to time of the most important purpose of their existence--which is to get viable information out to a somewhat susceptible public.

This study, with its background of pertinent literature and interviews with editors throughout the area, will expose the degree to which these press personnel are aware of the value-laden standards which are inherent in Social Responsibility theory. The interviewing of editors will bring the intentions of the theory to the limelight of today's reality. Most previous

studies have not centered around direct interviews with editors. This one on one confrontation should be illuminating and revealing.

Problem Statement

The main research questions has been alluded to before. To what extent does the Social Responsibility theory play in the day to day routines of today's editors and gatekeepers? Is the theory valid and justified? Is it relevant, considering today's controversial press climate? Do editors consciously think about the six tenets of Social Responsibility theory?

The main hypothesis for this study is that editors/gatekeepers do in fact have the basics down when it comes to being socially responsible. They may not have the theory posted on their bulletin boards, but they probably think of Social Responsibility theory at least some time during their day. In fact, it is probably pretty much a way of life to them. This study hopes to determine if that is the case.

Yet, if this is the case, how do untrue or inaccurate stories slip by editors and embarrass all in the field? The significance of doing this research is to keep mistakes from happening and to keep papers and the press economically healthy enough to maintain an independent stance in their community. The value of this study lies in the fact that editors in the press need to be reminded of the special needs of today's press environment--its limitations, restrictions, the importance of making errors, and its competition.

The press today has the unique opportunity, given the advances in technology, to produce a product that can fully inform while not taking the

public down a winding abyss of mis-information and conscious or unconscious deed.

The press today has the mandate to be responsible. No matter how important the story, no matter how salacious or sexy, the press must maintain high standards in every way and bring the news to its readers. in this age of mistrust of officials and institutions, it is even more imperative that the press look to such concepts as the Social Responsibility of the media for their own survival and for the survival of positive public perception.

In his excellent book on media monopoly, Bagdikian (1992) wrote:

As the country approaches the end of the century, the major media are extremely profitable and closely organized in a few powerful corporations. But underneath the spectacular annual profits and corporate self-satisfaction, there is a disturbing separation of most major media from the true nature of their country's population, a separation that threatens not only the future usefulness of the media, but the vitality of the American political process. (p.222)

This study hopes it can play but a small part in maintaining that political process.

Methods and Procedures

The writer contacted by phone eight editors and reporters at two Bay Area newspapers. Their information, coupled with published material and participant-observation, allowed the writer to triangulate and pattern match the data. The newspapers of choice were the San Francisco Examiner and the

Gilroy Dispatch, which is the smaller of the two publications. The writer compared and contracted the two case studies.

The writer also relied on the input of two well-known professors in the field, Jay Black, of the University of South Florida, and Ralph Barney, of BYU in Provo, Utah. These phone interviews greatly aided the perspective gained from the telephone interviews at the aforementioned newspapers.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Associations and commissions since the Colonial Era have debated the merits of the Social Responsibility theory. Critics have written that today such phrases as "the public's right to know" and the "public responsibility of the press" are likely to invade societal interaction or communication.

Such ideas and the press performance resulting from them are an important modification from traditional Libertarian theory, which occupied the beliefs of the Founding Fathers. Nothing in Libertarian theory established the public's right to information or required the publisher to assume moral responsibilities. The twentieth century however brought a gradual shift away from pure libertarianism, and was slowly blended in with today's "social responsibility of the press," or more aptly, "civic journalism."

The Theory

Social Responsibility theory or civic journalism has this major premise: Freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the American government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society. If the press does not assume these responsibilities, then some other agency must see that the essentials of mass communication are carried out.

Scholars agree that the functions of the press under the Social Responsibility theory are basically the same as those under libertarian theory. Six tasks were given the press as the theory evolved from libertarian theory:

- 1) Service the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs;
- 2) Enlighten the public to make it capable of self-government;
- 3) Safeguard the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government;
- 4) Service the economic system, primarily by bringing together the buyers of goods and services through the medium of advertising;
- 5) Provide the readership with entertainment;
- 6) Maintain its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests, which may or may not be its main function.

When the term "social responsibility" is used by the lay public, respondents usually add such values as truthful, fair, balanced, non-judgmental, and preserving "good taste."

Today Social Responsibility theory in general accepts the above six functions. But there is also a dissatisfaction with the interpretation of those functions by some media owners and the way in which the press has carried them out. (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1973) Theorists claim that the press has been deficient in performing these tasks. Owners accept the role of

servicing the economic system, for instance, but would not have this task be overshadowed by such functions as promoting the democratic process or enlightening the public. (Siebert et al., 1973)

Social Responsibility theory today is essentially a grafting of new ideas onto traditional theory. It is important to remember that the Theory is still chiefly a theory. (Siebert et al., 1973) It is important as a theory because it suggests a direction that today's freedom of the press theorists are heading. And it is important to note that most aspects of the theory had found their way into practice. (Siebert et al., 1973)

Libertarian theory, the precursor to Social Responsibility theory, was a composite of ideas which guided the Founding Fathers as they gave birth to this country. Milton's idea that man contained within him a "self-righting" process was but one influence on libertarians. In 1644 Milton was confident that truth would emerge in a free marketplace of ideas. (Christians et al., 1995)

Questions of privacy and confidentiality nearly always encounter claims about society's welfare over that of a particular person. "The public's right to know" has become somewhat of a journalistic slogan. To benefit the company or oneself, Christians et al. (1995) wrote, is not defensible. In these situations, where the editor/gatekeeper has to make choices, the press's loyalty to society warrants preeminence. It is this belief, outlined in Social Responsibility Theory, that most press at least acknowledge in today's up and down environment.

It if were not for a report on the state of the press in 1947, the entire theory of the Social Responsibility of the press might never have seen light.

The Hutchins Commission Report

In December of 1942 Henry R. Luce of Time asked Robert M. Hutchins, Chancellor, The University of Chicago, to head an inquiry into the present state and future prospects of the freedom of the press. The Commission on the Freedom of the Press, all selected by Hutchins, began its work a year later. It was not until 1947 that the report was released and published, under the title, A Free and Responsible Press (The Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947). Much of Social Responsibility theory is derived in part from the ideas presented in the report.

The inquiry was financed by a \$200,000 grant from Time and a \$15,000 grant from Encyclopedia Britannica. At its first meeting, the Commission decided to focus on radio, newspapers, motion pictures, magazines, and books. They used the term "press" to cover all the work these institutions did. The Commission did not conduct research per se. Rather, it heard testimony from 58 men and women connected with the press. The staff of the commission recorded interviews with more than 225 members of the industries, government, and private agencies concerned with the press.

The Commission was concerned with the education of the American public in the field of public affairs. The report also dealt with the responsibilities of the owners and managers to their consciences and the common good for the formation of public opinion. The Commission wrote that the press was one of the most powerful influences over public opinion

than any other factor. The Commission was concerned with the flow of ideas in a civilized society. The general report was a collaborative effort and had a great deal of effect on publishers and editors.

People have been looking for ways to control the press from the Libertarian times. One means of control is from the outside, such as government control. In response the press has decided upon inner codes which guide it and keep it out of legal, social, and political trouble.

Circles of Control

Agee, Ault, and Emery (1977) discussed five circles of control which form a basic model for press personnel to use and act upon. The circles are as follows:

- 1) The innermost circle represents the professional standards and ethical practices of individuals--publishers, reporters, editors, etc., many of which are known as "gatekeepers."
- 2) This circle represents the standards of practice and the codes of ethics established by the individual medium. This assumes that all media operate under certain internal guidelines.
- 3) The third circle consists of professional and industrywide standards of conduct embodied in the statements of sound practice. Professionalism and peer pressure are the major forces leading to compliance by the press and those working for them. Various Societies would fall into this circle.
- 4) The fourth circle represents the basic press philosophies and

the laws of individual governments. Under the Social Responsibility concept, it is the obligation of owners and managers to be socially responsible, to ensure that all public issues are presented fairly and fully so that people may form their own opinions about the issues.

- 5) The fifth and final circle represents the limits people will tolerate regarding all types of human activity. No editor or organization can pass beyond this limit without reprisal from the public, and it is the public who has the final say on what the editor is doing or not doing.

These circles of social and legal control are not fixed for all time. The standards of the individual press respond to changing social mores as do the decisions of editors.

Agee et al. (1977) wrote that criticism of the press has been commonplace in America since the publication of the first newspaper. Today the press is under increasing attack for their perceived lapses in professional conduct.

However, Agee, et al. (1977) wrote that by almost any standard of measurement, the press today is more responsible than in any previous period.

The Polls

Truth, honesty, and fairness are bedrock expectations of all professional press practitioners. Polls however, show that journalists are ranked below the clergy, doctors, and police in terms of honesty and other standards. The press

is blamed for invading personal privacy, smearing reputations, practicing deception, unduly criticizing government and business leaders, emphasizing "bad" news over "good" news, sensationalizing stories, reporting gossip and rumors, developing conflicts of interest, and failing to correct errors promptly and conspicuously, or even admitting that mistakes have been made.

Princeton Survey Research Associates interviewed 752 adults by telephone on July 9-10 1998 to determine what the public thinks about the press. The margin of error is +/- 4 percent. ("Polls," 1998).

The Princeton Survey asked the public where they get most of their news about current events. Television received a reply of 61 percent, newspapers 24 percent. When asked how much can be believed in the media, the public at an 11 percent rate said almost all of it. Thirty-five percent said most of it, and 42 percent said only some of it.

When asked whether or not recent media mergers have improved the quality and accuracy of news reporting 14 percent said it was improved, 35 percent reported the mergers had made things worse, and 46 percent said there was not much change in the media.

Thirty-nine percent of the public said they thought news organizations get their facts straight while 53 percent of respondees said the press was often inaccurate. When asked if the competition for ratings and profits had pushed the media too far, the public said 76 percent too far and 20 percent not too far.

A majority, 62 percent, were less likely to trust the media because of recent media inaccuracies, while 30 percent said they were isolated incidents.

The Press Today

Almost every journalist in the United States today either is a member of one or more journalism and mass communications associations or is represented by the organization for which he or she works. Thousands are active in local groups. The purposes of almost every organization are to exchange ideas in order to advance professional ideals and practices, and to work collectively to solve common problems.

There are trade associations, organizations of individuals such as the Society of Professional Journalists, centers, institutes, action groups. The purposes of almost every organization are to exchange ideas in order to advance professional ideals and practices, and to work collectively to solve common problems.

There are trade associations, organizations of individuals such as the Society of Professional Journalists, centers, institutes, action groups, and other aid programs such as the William Randolph Hearst Foundation. Agee, et al. (1977) wrote that because of such organizations and their strong support, the improvement in media performance that has characterized the last several decades seems certain to continue. It is because of the interaction of such associations that the concept of the Theory of Social Responsibility can survive, be discussed, and grow.

The fact that theory principles are accepted today by members of the press does not mean they are universally observed. Some news that ought to be published does not get by gatekeepers and is sometimes suppressed.

Treatment of political news does not always meet these ideals of fairness. Financial strength can also be used against the public interest as well as for it. Standards of decency and privacy are sometimes violated. But newspaper performance as well as editorial protestations show that responsibility principles are the guides most journalists seek to follow, whether or not they always succeed.

Improved communication processes over the years has extended the basis of news interest. The character of news audiences and their interests have changed, but the obligation of the press is the same. It must provide information. The years have enriched the basic concept of news by bringing new awareness of news responsibility.

One new characteristic of news is the stronger emphasis on explanation as a kind of fourth dimension of news. In this complex era virtually no event is totally isolated as a thoughtful press perceives. Reporting that does not show an event's context is unfinished reporting. News must have not only length, breadth, and height, but also depth and orientation. This is not political or ideological orientation, it is cause and effect orientation rooted in objectivity.

The purpose of such an orientation in the press is to show relationships that might not otherwise be apparent to many news consumers. The press usually refers to this fourth dimension as interpretation or background. The press devotes many hours to the discussion of interpretation in today's journalism. Few meetings of the press pass without general consideration of it.

Another characteristic of the press today is the increased American awareness of the principle of freedom and the right to information. The press is thwarted, despite sunshine laws, by efforts at concealment of information. The Constitution protects the press for the good of the public. The press is free because the public, in the American form of society, has the right and need to know the truth about current life. This right derives from the principles of the Enlightenment and its belief in the man of freedom.

The responsible press designs news so that the audience is provided a full and fair presentation of significant facts, to the best of its ability. The trend to interpretation and the insistence on the right to access for information throw a spotlight on the rudder of the news presentation process, which is to make full and accurate information both available and understandable. Today, as opposed to the counter-cultural years when the "new journalism was popular." interpretation seems to have been replaced by inaccuracy.

Codes, such as the Social Responsibility of the Press, are not enough to insure the sort of the press that society requires. Journalists, wrote Emery, Ault, and Agee (1973), must be free to do their best work. Editors must be free to edit but not to censor, and journalists must be free from censorship and arbitrary interference by management as management is free from censorship and interference by government. Emery, et al. (1973) wrote that the only proper standard of journalism is accuracy, excellence, newsworthiness, and taste--the first two to be interpreted strictly, the last two freely. Lastly, they wrote, that because all journalists are degraded when one is shelved or blacklisted, and all

are censored when one is censored, arbitrary discrimination against one's colleagues will not be tolerated.

Inaccuracies and Untruths

But what about the colleague who plagiarizes, lies, or misleads. Surely this breaks the first tenet of the Social Responsibility theory of the media: to provide information.

On August 7, 1998 the Washington Post printed a summation of the trials of Boston Globe columnist Mike Barnicle. Barnicle, who has been with the Globe for many years, was accused of "ripping off" a comedian's jokes for his column. Barnicle rejected the Globe's demand that he resign over whether or not he misled his paper. He has since been fired. One newspaper staff member said Barnicle gave editors conflicting accounts of how he got the one-liners, which came to a total of eight.

The Barnicle untruths came six weeks after the Globe accepted the resignation of Patricia Smith, a black columnist, who admitted fabricating all or part of four columns. The paper feels that in the wake of the Smith wrongdoing, the editors at the Globe have to take this drastic step. Barnicle has been accused in the past of both plagiarism and inventing characters. This is a case where editors/gatekeepers derive decisions made from the Social Responsibility Theory of the free flow of information.

The San Jose Mercury News, in 1996, accused U.S. government officials and the Central Intelligence Agency of protecting a California drug-trafficking ring whose members contributed money to the Nicaraguan rebels

knows as the Contras during the 1980's. In the past months the newspaper has said that the reports were "inaccurate" and the reporting was faulty, to say the least. A recent report by the Justice Department's internal watchdog has said that there was no evidence that U.S. officials protected the drug trafficking ring. The Mercury News originally charged that a San Francisco-based ring introduced crack cocaine to Los Angeles, sent millions of dollars to the CIA-backed contras, helped spark a crack epidemic in American inner cities and operated under the protection of U.S. Government officials. ("CIA Link," 1998). The editors of the newspaper said on July 24, 1998 that the Contra-drugs link was exaggerated. The recent report quoted one of the drug dealers as estimating their total contributions to the Contras \$49,000, and several of the dealers' associates provided even smaller estimates. The report said, "The implication that the drug trafficking was connected to the CIA was also not supported by the facts." ("CIA Link," 1998). After apologizing to the public over the past two years for its inaccuracies, the San Jose Mercury News transferred the author of the series to its Sacramento branch. He was later fired. This is another case where editors have covered themselves in order to maintain overall integrity with the public.

The public's faith in the press may be at a new low. The July 4, 1998 issue of the Santa Rosa Press-Democrat contains a revealing cartoon on its editorial page. ("Press," 1998) It shows an open door marked "Center for Responsible Journalism" and a desk, undoubtedly a journalist's, on which are seen newspapers with the headlines: "O.J., Columnist Fabrications,"

“Cincinnati Reporter Steals Evidence, Monicagate! “ “Unnamed Sources,” “Princes Di,” and “CNN--Nerve Gas.” The cartoon shows the footprint of the journalist heading for the office window. He/she has obviously jumped out of it.

CNN and Time produced a story on the use of nerve gas on American defectors for the premiere of its “Newsstand: CNN & Time, for broadcast on CNN and publication by Time. The story, titled “Valley of Death,” was later retracted as unproven by both CNN and Time, after the stories had appeared. CNN News Group Tom Johnson called the stories a “fiasco.” Two producers at CNN were fired by the Network for their untruths, but CNN star reporter, Peter Arnett, whose name appeared in the byline of the Time version of the story, was retained by the network because officials said he did not have that much to do with the story.

On July 22, 1998 a Pentagon investigation found no evidence to support the controversial story that the U.S. had used nerve gas on its own soldiers during Vietnam. The Pentagon inquiry was ordered by Defense Secretary William Cohen, in response to the CNN-Time story. According to the Pentagon investigation, the substance used in the four-day engagement was concentrated but non-fatal tear gas. The U.S. military has no official record of American defections to the enemy during the Vietnam war. The producers, April Oliver and Jack Smith, were experienced news hands, especially Smith who was a CBS bureau chief at one time. Oliver’s former colleagues described her as ethical and extremely hard working. One executive at PBS said however

that Oliver always investigated well-known players. Oliver worked at PBS from 1989 to 1994. Rarely have such inaccuracies created such a big story and given the public the impression the press is “not careful” at the least.

What Editors/Gatekeepers Can Do

Several commissions and seminars have met in recent years in response to Social Responsibility theory in order to establish a better understanding of the requirements of the press in today’s society.

According to the Commission on Freedom of the Press, one requirement (a direct guideline to editors) is to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning. (Siebert et al., 1973) This requirement demands that the press be accurate--it must not lie or deceive. Editors must identify fact as fact and opinion as opinion. There is no better evidence of a growing fidelity to the public interest than the development of objective reporting.

The Commission wrote that it is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully, it is now necessary to report the truth about the fact. Instead of assuming that two half-truths make a truth, the press should seek “the whole truth.” However, because of its fidelity to the public interest, the press on occasion has been reluctant to publish the truth about the fact. As has been shown in examples above, editors must have the courage to screen out what is not true. But, at the same time, merely reporting the news is insufficient (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947).

A second requirement of the press, according to the Commission, is that it serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism. This is part of Social Responsibility theory's tenet of enlightening the public. This means that agencies of mass communication should regard themselves as common carriers of public discussion (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1947). Editors must filter out what is good or bad. This does not mean that laws should compel gatekeepers to accept all applicants for space or that the government should regulate their rates, or even that one can demand, as a right, that the media disseminate his/her ideas. The Unabomber's manifesto that appeared in The New York Times and The Washington Post is a case in point.

The giants of the press should carry views contrary to their own without abdicating their own right of advocacy. The press should try to represent all important viewpoints, not merely those with which the publisher agrees. In so doing, editors should identify all sources of news. As the press has become consolidated, the need for different viewpoints becomes all the more important. According to Social Responsibility Theory, newspapers have the responsibility to help society inform itself and act intelligently. They have a responsibility at the business level; also public opinion today confirms that the press has a responsibility to minorities. Today newspaper publishers are denied the luxury of refusing to deal with those whom they dislike or of using their control or of using a communications medium to punish those who patronize a competitor (Siebert, et al. 1973).

Another requirement of the press and its personnel is that they project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society, thus creating a mirror of society. Commissions have urged editors to accurately portray the social groups. Today editors/gatekeepers probably would say that this requirement is implicit in their conscientious effort to report the day's intelligence truthfully and impartially. When editors stray from impartiality, balance suffers along with the overall integrity of the publication. The press should be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society, as determined by government and public opinion. Editors would probably accept this requirement with little hesitation, and would respond that the function of a good editorial page is to reflect this principle.

A fifth and final requirement of the press is that the press provide full access to the day's intelligence. This principle is a direct descendent of one of the tenets of the Social Responsibility theory of the media. The citizen today requires more current information than in previous times, with the boost of faster and faster forms of electronic information in particular. Editors must insure a wide distribution of news and opinion. When they don't, editors are breaking one of the tenets of Social Responsible theory and are putting the public at risk, as decision-making within the public on vital issues becomes more and more important in this global age.

The public too has certain obligations toward the press. Some have concluded that what is needed is a public awareness of the tremendous power enjoyed by the media--power concentrated in too few hands, and an awareness of how far the press fails to meet the needs of society. Once the public

understands, it can act in three ways to improve the press. First, nonprofit institutions should help the press carry out its required tasks. Second, educational institutions should create centers for advanced study, research, and critical publication in the field. (The present schools of journalism should give students the broadest of educations) (Siebert, et al. 1973).

Third, an independent agency should be established to appraise press performance and report on it each year. Editors can be most valuable to this type of study. The government, recognizing that the press must remain a privately-owned business, can nevertheless help to give its citizens the kind of communications systems that they require (Siebert, et al. 1973).

Gamble (1986) wrote that when asked to define "news," journalists supplied a multitude of responses ranging to "what raises eyebrows" to "the report of an event." Most editors agree that before an event can become newsworthy, it must meet the following criteria. It must have prominence, proximity, consequence, timelines, and human interest. What is newsworthy also depends at least in part on publisher preferences and the size of the news holes. Editors have no control usually over the amount of advertising, but many have a constant battle with publishers for the amount of space made available.

Once information has been gathered and deemed newsworthy, it still needs to be transformed into an acceptable news article. Three key variables shape the editorial process. The pressure of time and the need for eye-catching headlines are the editor's chief concerns, other than the article being truthful. Journalists who object to the traditional "facts only" style of

writing may take comfort in the fact that editor's are more and more using "analysis" piece.

The press and courts have tried to come to terms on a number of issues. Among the issues that have been debated include libel, privacy versus the right to know, freedom of the press versus a defendant's right to a fair trial, the problems posed by prior restraint, and the ramifications of the Freedom of Information Act. In the course of performing their jobs, in addition to debating legal issues, editors are also faced with a number of moral dilemmas. Conflict of interest, fair play, concealment of vital information, are all part of the editors/gatekeeper daily decision-making. it is doubtful that editors are always 100 percent correct in their handling of legal and ethical problems. The Social Responsibility of the press does not give much help in these areas.

Libertarian Theory Vs. Social Responsibility Theory

Few editors today would say that the press has no sense of responsibility to the public. As time passed and new technologies appeared on the scene, wrote Gamble (1986), libertarian theory was replaced by Social Responsibility theory. Social Responsibility theorists assert that the press has a right to criticize the government, but it also has the obligation to inform the citizenry properly and to respond to societal needs and interests (Siebert, et al. 1973).

Adherents of the theory, emphasizing that people need to have access to information, require that the press work to ensure that all aspects of the political spectrum are covered. Also, advocates of the theory believe that the press should be charged with the task of developing and enforcing ethics in

the public interest. The legal basis for these views lies in the strength of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Today there are still challenges to the Amendment by those who think the press goes too far.

The Libertarian theory, which grew out of the thinking of the Enlightenment, encouraged the notion that no matter how the press performed, its performance was by its nature in the public interest. The Libertarian view is still the anchor as to what the press today should and should not do. The Libertarian theory however is slowly being replaced by the Social Responsibility Theory of the press.

Today, critics find that freedom of the press, as originally conceived, was essentially a negative freedom which implied no standards of performance or responsibility. The press today sees social responsibility as playing an ever increasingly important part in shaping the public's attitude toward press performance.

Behind the philosophy was the Newtonian idea that the universe is a vast motion machine, going on timelessly according to certain laws of nature. Man could work on his own salvation, because his Creator had given him the all important function of reason. By so doing, he could build the good society. Today Social Responsibility theory is less encouraged by the nature of man--we need strong outside forces to keep us in line.

Men, by common consent, formed governments to protect their property and to make sure their natural rights were not curtailed. The best way the government could assure men of their rights was by leaving the individual as free as possible. The best government was that which governed

least. If the government betrayed the liberties of the people, government could be ended and the people had the right to establish a new order. Today the press through the Social Responsibility theory has a check on the workings on government--through publication.

From these views came our traditional Libertarian theory of the press. Under it the press was to have only wide and scattered boundaries to its freedom--laws against obscenity and libel, mild laws against sedition. Everything the press carried served the cause of truth.

If, under the Libertarian theory, what the press carried was false, men would reject it; if it was true, men would accept it. More often than not man would find some truth amidst falsehood, and some falsehood amidst truth. Under the Social Responsibility theory, the press's first job is to provide information which is assumed to be truthful.

Whether or not these standards, based on man's rationality, could survive in today's cynical press environment seems doubtful.

The next century of Americans brought with it more of a sense that the common good of the public needed to be protected, even encouraged. Codes began to appear, suggesting ways of how newspapers should do their business. In all of this there was a trace of growing sense of social responsibility, for publishers were openly acknowledging a newspaper's duty to the public. Freedom was being linked with responsibility.

Today Social Responsibility is implicit in the campaign to gain access to information of the "the public's right to know." Editors provide information that the public will indeed know, provide interpretation, including views

representative of the people as a whole, not just those of special interests, and raising the standards of American journalism in the process.

Practitioners seem to agree with the Social Responsibility Theory in some of its philosophical breaks with Libertarian theory. First, the Libertarian theory is not relevant for modern society. Secondly, freedom carries with it responsibility. Lastly, man is not a wholly rational creature. He is not so much irrational as lethargic (Siebert et al. 1973).

The Responsibility of the Public

In a good many places, Social Responsibility Theory has evolved into practice. The final shape the Social Responsibility Theory will take is still to be evolved and remains in large measure up to the press itself. One of the greatest deeds the press could perform would be to help its readers accept an idea which the press has already accepted--that responsibility goes with freedom.

If the press links responsibility with freedom to publish, then should not the reader link responsibility with freedom to read and listen? The press has begun to see its own responsibilities, but it has done little to make readers see theirs. If there is not enough information provided or the public turns its back on the right to know and free-flowing information, then there is a fundamental breakdown in Social Responsibility Theory. The press will switch to entertainment if there is not a need to know among the public. Current events in Washington, D.C., the Monica Lewinsky affair, show that perhaps too much information is being provided on a subject, and the public is becoming

restless. The press however must continue to do its job--getting out what needs to be told so that the public can make an informed decision.

Social Responsibility puts strong faith in the conscience of every journalist. But the journalist does not work in a vacuum. Social groups as well affect what editors/gatekeepers send out to the public.

The Social Responsibility of the Press has this major premise: Freedom carries concomitant obligations, and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under the American government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain functions of mass communication in contemporary society. If the press does not assume these responsibilities, then some other agency must see that the essentials of mass communication are carried out.

Social Responsibility at Work

A June 5, 1998 article by the New York Times is a good example of journalists employing the credo of the third tenet of the Social Responsibility Theory--keeping an eye on government, even at the risk of livelihood and life ("Crusading," 1998).

In the small town of Linden, Ala., just west of Montgomery, a weekly newspaper editor and his star reporter, his wife, picked a fight with a corrupt county sheriff's department.

The editor, Goodloe Sutton, and his wife Jean, knew it would cost them as they uncovered everything from extortion to petty thefts to drug peddling,

because of the nature of the 2,500 population small town. Linden is not like a big city, where it is perhaps easier to find corruption in government.

Advertisers who were political allies of Sheriff Roger Davis of Marengo County stopped their advertisements. Readers, who stood by the powerful, popular sheriff, canceled subscriptions. Threats came in the mail as proof of corruption was spread across the weekly's front page. "Remember, your day will come," cautioned one displeased reader, who was a supporter of the sheriff.

The Sutton's newspaper, The Democrat Reporter, with circulation down to 6,000, finally won, as the sheriff and two top deputies went to prison last year for a variety of crimes that the newspaper had chronicled over the last several years. Since then, reporters from throughout the United States have traveled to this small town to ask the Suttons if they had ever feared for their lives.

Sutton, whose father bought the paper in 1917, said he probably should have feared for the safety of his wife and two sons. But he said he had a feeling that everything would be fine, a sense of confidence he never fully understood until the day last December when the sheriff went to prison on extortion and bribery charges.

Even now, as the sheriff and his deputies sit in prison, many people who support the Suttons will not do so publicly, out of fear of reprisals from friends of the sheriff.

Editing

John F. Kennedy once described what an editor should be. One should be educated in the liberal traditions, willing to take the long look, undisturbed by prejudices and slogans of the moment, who attempt to make an honest judgment on difficult events. Such people could distinguish the real from the illusory, the long range from the temporary, the significant from the petty. (Gilmore & Root, 1976)

"These stiff requirements," wrote Gilmore and Root (1976), "will always mean a shortage of ideal editors. If the democratic society is to function properly, however, it must have a large number of editors who come close to the ideal. Many of the highly qualified professionals (of the future) will be men and women who today are journalism students or beginning journalists" (p.3).

Because journalism professionals advance rapidly, the responsibilities of executive positions may come early. The ideal editor has been a reporter of various worlds--politics, government, social welfare, labor, and business. Men and women at every level of journalism usually will find satisfaction in helping to inform hundreds or even thousands of people about vital public affairs. Informing is one of the central tenets of Social Responsibility Theory. Gilmore and Root (1976) wrote that an editor at all levels must be thorough and painstaking. They must hold up a story for an edition or two, or even a day or more, until additional facts can be gathered. The authors wrote that editors need courage, sometimes under intense

pressure. Editors must make the whole news picture clear as well as fair. The reader expects and deserves to have events reported so they make sense. The editor's job is to sift and organize the news so that the reader does not have to struggle to get information.

This is creative work, and it is socially responsible work, for it requires knowledge, imagination, writing skill, and an eye for design. An editor who combines these elements can create a paper that informs the public and guides them to intelligent decisions.

Editors need to convey to their newsmen the following goals, according to Gilmore and Root (1976):

- 1) To inform -- a vital part of SR.
- 2) To alert -- again, SR Theory as watchmen.
- 3) To interpret -- less emphasis on objectivity.
- 4) To educate -- raise the level of your audience.
- 5) To lead -- through honesty and courage.
- 6) To persuade -- taking a stand.
- 7) To provide a forum -- something that should be done according to SR Theory.
- 8) To inspire -- a newspaper is not a church, but it can inspire.
- 9) To entertain -- life is not all drab (see SR Theory) (p.7).

Gatekeeping

The editor who puts out a paper which fulfills all these varied functions is a major figure in the community and in society. Gilmore and Root (1976)

wrote that the term "gatekeeper" has been coined by some researchers to emphasize the editor's importance at a cutoff point where the decision is made to stop some items, to let a trickle of other news through, or to permit the flow of a story judged as important. Past research has found the gatekeepers to be highly "subjective," colored by his/her personal experiences and attitudes.

How do the editors make their decisions? Why do they disagree so vigorously on what is news? We clearly need to know more about what influences gatekeepers, wrote Gilmore and Root (1976).

Clearly they need to be aware of the Social Responsibility of the Press and its ramifications.

And society, wrote Gilmore and Root (1976), needs better-trained editors who can attain maximum objectivity and who will know their audiences and facilitate intelligent communication of them.

This by far is the most important mandate of the Social Responsibility of the Press theory.

The Utilitarian Viewpoint

Another widely held principle, aside from Judeo-Christian principles, promotes "the greatest good for the greatest number." Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill argued that utilitarianism is conduct which produces the greatest happiness for the most people.

Utilitarianism appeals to the practical minded by dealing in quantities. Another advantage of this concept of greatest good is its democratic flavor.

Milton and Jefferson argued for freedom of the press as an aid to the common reason. The Utilitarian theory applies that freedom to the common good. Here is a philosophy that rationalizes majorities and big circulations.

But, according to Gilmore and Root (1976), for newspaper work, the golden Rule, has its difficulties. There is a practical problem in deciding what really is good for the most people. What about revealing the name in a case of rape? How do you weigh such things? Yet editors can feel "greatest good" does help them weigh.

This suggests a still greater problem: the tyranny of the majority. Do the masses have a right to news that will hurt a minority of people? Or would a majority "vote" for suppression of news to justify keeping the facts from a minority, simply because less good seems to be involved?

Editors who print salacious news can rationalize that they are utilitarian. In fact, when they are criticized the reflex of many editors is utilitarian; they say they are giving the public what it wants. The very self-righteousness of such a position, however, underscores the limitations of this philosophy: editors adhering to it too literally may slight the good of the cultured minority with higher taste than the masses and of the intellectual minority needing the free exchange of ideas and contributing to the real good of society.

Gilmore and Root (1976) wrote that to apply utilitarian theory most usefully, editors must consider the "greatest number of people" not as stupid, faceless masses but as groups of important, reasonable, individuals.

The Golden Rule and the rule of the greatest good do not exhaust the list which could be developed in a pluralistic society. Balancing these two is not the only way to deal with the ethical problems of newspapering. We can get new slants on the tensions and balances ever present in editorial decisions if we approach the problem from different theoretical vantage points.

The two most pertinent concepts to be reviewed are the Libertarian theory and the Social Responsibility theory.

Libertarian Theory Revisited

The freedom of the newspaper editor is the main characteristic of the Libertarian theory. This concept, developed by such men as Milton and Jefferson, opposes the autocrat's power to license and censor.

It holds that editors should have the liberty to print what they please, restrained by only a few laws. One journalist or another will dig out and print what the people ought to have. This seems to be the view of the majority of editors that were interviewed.

The horrible events of the last century and pessimistic intellectual trends since Darwin and Freud leads to the assumption that the optimism of this theory may seem naive. Can men really discover through reason what is best? Many youth today curiously go along with the assumptions of many of their elders. Most American editors embrace this tradition of hopefulness about men. They oppose government interference and control in the hope that common men will find the truth in what is printed.

Gilmore and Root (1976) wrote that this Libertarian concept has its aspect of social good, a fact that is often overlooked. Those who work under the theory find that selfishness is not part of the theory. "Sinful" editors have often abused this freedom. They have printed scurrilous political attacks, exaggerated and faked the news, scandalmongered and pandered to the cheapest tastes.

Before he died Jefferson himself was strongly impelled toward second thoughts about the virtue of editorial freedom. According to the theory however, from what editors print will emerge the knowledge John and Joan Citizen need for intelligent action. To work today the theory requires reasonable printing costs and competition unrestricted by press monopolies.

Gilmore and Root (1976): "Then even those who are most hard-headedly realistic about the difficulties of opening the marketplace to all ideas may still logically contend that the Libertarian theory offers the brightest hope of good for society" (p. 247).

DISCUSSION

SR Theory Redux

The social strength of libertarian theory is worthy of consideration. Social Responsibility theory tends to assume all claim to social good. Advocates accuse newspapers of social irresponsibility and call for ways to see that the press fulfills its social responsibilities.

The roots of the SR Theory can be traced to the 1947 report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press. Known as the Hutchins Commission, this group criticized press performance and listed several demands which society makes on the press. One of its suggestions was the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press. (Siebert et al., 1973)

Such suggestions and proposals have been increasing since World War II. In Britain royal commissions made blistering comments about the press, and since 1953 the British Press Council has monitored performance. Sweden has a court of honor to adjudicate complaints against the papers. Editors have urged a similar body in this country. however, almost all American editors have shouted down suggestions like those of the Hutchins Commission as the worthless idea of eggheads who "don't know anything about newspapers."

From the days of the New Deal increased pressure to make newspapers more responsive was most inevitable. The intellectual pressures behind these moves were those religious and philosophical concepts of the Golden Rule and utilitarianism.

So far, the Constitution has protected the press, but regulation may be just around the corner. But basic laws can be modified or ignored. A social-responsibility theory of the press would naturally garner wide support on similar grounds.

Today, when newspaper publishers speak about their calling, such phrases as "The public's right to know" and the "public responsibility of the press" are likely to enter their vocabulary. Such ideas and press performance resulting from them are an important modification of traditional libertarian theory. There was, as the writer has stated above, nothing in libertarian theory which required the publisher to assume moral responsibility. One publisher was quoted as the Wall Street Journal as saying that a newspaper is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk. (Siebert, et al., 1973)

The Theory.

As we have seen, the twentieth century brought a gradual shift away from pure libertarian theory, and in its place began to emerge what has been called "the social responsibility of the press." Just what is meant by social responsibility theory? The theory has this major premise. Freedom carries with it concomitant obligations. The press, which enjoys a privileged position in our society because of governmental considerations, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions in contemporary American society. Libertarian philosophy will carry the press to a certain extent, but if the press does not assume its

responsibilities then some other agency must see to it that the essential functions of mass communication are carried out.

As the writer has written above, there are six functions that the press supplies to society. The social responsibility in general accepts those six functions. But it also reflects a dissatisfaction with the interpretation of those functions by some media owners and operators and the way the press has carried them out. Social Responsibility theory accepts the role of the press by servicing the political system, enlightening the public, in safeguarding the liberties of the individual. But, importantly, the theory represents that the press has been deficient in performing those tasks.

The theory accepts the role of the press in servicing the economic system, but this function should outshine such other functions as promoting the democratic processes or enlightening the public. It accepts the role of the press in providing entertainment, but it insists on the promotion of "good" entertainment. The theory accepts the need for the press to be self-supporting, but if necessary it would exempt certain individual media from having to earn their way in the market place.

The emerging Social Responsibility theory has grown out of the ideas of many persons. Many men who contributed to the theory might abhor it as a whole, just as John Milton abhorred total libertarian theory. The social responsibility theory still is mainly a grafting of new ideas onto traditional theory. The Commission on Freedom of the Press after World War II did a great deal toward making social responsibility a new, integrated theory, instead of just an appendage to the traditional one.

Important to the idea of social responsibility were A Free and Responsible Press by the Commission as a whole and Freedom of the Press: A framework of Principle, by William E. Hocking, a member of the Commission. (Siebert, et al., 1973). The members of the Commission did not see things unanimously, since many members still clung to the old theories. However, all members agreed on the joint report and to a brief "Summary of Principle."

It is important to remember that the theory is an Anglo-American concept. Near the time that the Commission was reporting its findings, a Royal Commission on the Press, formed at the instigation of the National Union of Journalists, started to study concentration in the press in Britain and to improve press performance there. That group's report supports and supplements the writings of the Commission on Freedom of the Press. This fact seems questionable given the plethora of tabloids and their actions today in England.

It is important to remember that the social responsibility theory is still chiefly a theory. As a theory, however, it is important because it suggests a direction in which thinking about freedom of the press is heading. Some aspects of the theory have found their way into practice.

On recommendation of the Royal Commission, a General Council of the Press has been formed in England to encourage a sense of public responsibility and public service in the press. Its main function has been to condemn and publicize questionable practices on the part of the press, to investigate complaints, to seek redress if the complaints are justified, and to

reply to them if they are not. The first annual report to the public included charges against a number of specific newspapers as well as a survey of trends in the press as a whole. The English press, after hounding Princess Diana for years, promised to clean up its act after her tragic death. Some form of agreement between publishers is on the table or already has been signed.

In America the publishers of several newspapers feel a strong sense of responsibility to the community they serve. To regress for a minute, the movie industry, for instance, operating under a system of self-regulation, serves the public interest as it conceives it. The radio and television networks, required by law to serve the public interest, perform in an environment they take to be the public welfare. Many persons would remark that there is a large bridge between the genuine public interest and what the movies, radio and television take it to be. The main point that should be remembered however is that radio and television and the movies represent sharp cleavages with the traditional theory of the press. They are far closer to social responsibility theory than libertarian theory.

As has been said, when the framers of the federal constitution appended an amendment establishing freedom of the press, they had no intention of binding the publisher to certain responsibilities in exchange for his freedom. Truth telling had little or nothing to do with it. The press in the first years of the United States was characterized by partisanship, invective, and unrestrained--very much like certain members of contemporary Congress. Public opinion had demanded that restrictions on the press stop. But there was a deeper reason that the publishers got a free hand.

The framers of the constitution were children of the Enlightenment, and their assumptions about the nature of man and the relationship of man to government were implicit in the instrument that was drafted. The press must be free to serve as a guardian of governmental breaches on individual liberty. If the press were free, men would speak. They might lie or distort. But the invisible hand envisioned by Adam Smith and the self-righting process expounded by John Milton would set things right. Man would search the marketplace of ideas for the ideas that were right and true. He would separate truth from falsehood and good from bad.

Over time however faith diminished in the optimistic notion that a virtually absolute freedom and the nature of man had built-in correctives for the press. A large number of the population began to demand certain standards of performance from the press. Legislation was threatened and even enacted. People wanted certain standards from the press. On their own, publishers began to link responsibility with freedom. They formulated codes of ethical behavior, and they operated their media with some concern for the public good, at least the public good as they regarded it. A rationale of social responsibility began to evolve.

Technological Developments.

The Social Responsibility theory of the press came into being as a result of many things. One was the technological and industrial revolution, changing the face of the nation and the American way of living, which affected the nature of the press itself. Another reason for the development

of the theory was an increase in criticism, which spoke louder and louder as the media grew in size and importance. Another reason was the new intellectual climate in which some persons looked with suspicion on the basic assumptions of the Enlightenment. Finally there was the development of a professional spirit as journalism attracted men of principle and education, and as the communications industries reflected the growing sense of social responsibility as seen in American business and industry.

The technological and industrial revolutions and the social changes that came with them had lasting effects on the press. Tech advances increased the size, speed, and efficiency of the old media and launched new ones such as motion pictures and televisions. Advertising increased because of industrialization, which became the major support of the Communications industry. All this was accompanied by urbanization, and the large number of people coming together in cities helped to make possible newspapers of large circulation. Gains in education and the number of citizens expanded the market for products of the press. The press was everywhere.

It also became an industry controlled by relatively few owners. Improvements made it possible for just a few media to serve vast audiences. But the equipment for reaching a large audience were costly. As units of the press became increasingly large and expensive, it became harder for newcomers to make it in such a competitive atmosphere, and many old-timers failed to survive.

Ownership of the media came to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The daily newspaper steadily decreased in number, and so did the cities with competing papers. Five giant publishers accounted for the great bulk of magazine circulation. The movies fell into few hands and radio-television was controlled by three large networks.

Criticism.

The press became the object of a good deal of criticism as it became a giant industry. The first full-length book attacking the press appeared in 1859. There had been attacks before that, but the criticism increased in force and intensity in the twentieth-century. The themes of twentieth-century criticism were as follows: (Siebert, et al., 1973).

- 1) The press has displayed its enormous power for its own ends. The owners have propagated their own opinions, especially in matters of politics and economics, at the expense of opposing views.
- 2) The press has been subservient to big business and at times has let advertisers control editorial policy and editorial content.
- 3) The press has resisted social change.
- 4) The press has often paid more attention to the superficial and sensational than to the significant in its coverage of current happenings, and its entertainment has been lacking in substance.

- 5) The press has endangered public morals.
- 6) The press has invaded the privacy of individuals without just cause.
- 7) The press is controlled by one socioeconomic class, loosely the "business class," and access to the industry is difficult for newcomers; therefore, the free and open market of ideas is endangered (p. 78).

These are the general indictments against the press as a whole. The specific charges have varied with the times and with the media. Books and magazines have been less criticized than the other media. Individual books have however been damned as corrupters of morals since the century opened, as were large numbers of paper-bound editions in the 1094s and 50s. Magazines have often been the targets of public outrage. The magazines which traffic in pornography and comic books have been charged with debasing moral standards and with inciting young people to crime.

As advertising became more and more important to newspapers, it was viewed as a sinister force that tainted the news columns and caused editors to suppress material unfavorable to big advertisers. Critics recognized that the publisher, as a businessman, might naturally share the attitudes of other businessmen and be influenced by them in the conduct of his newspaper. In the 1930s business came under attack and publishers generally took an anti-business stance. In the 1940s a major concern was the declining number of dailies in face of the highest circulations on record, a situation which some observers thought to be detrimental to the free flow of ideas. Charges against

the movies were as they always have been--that they corrupt the morals of society. Radio-television came under attack because programs aired came to be seen as products of a few individuals who promoted annoying advertising.

Intellectuals and the New Theory.

The intellectual climate of the twentieth century seems to have favored the growth of a theory such as social responsibility and to have shunned libertarian theory. Alfred North Whitehead once observed that the mentality of an age derives from the world view which is dominant in the educated sections of society, and this world view influences the thought patterns in such areas as ethics, religion, and science. (Siebert, et al., 1973) A theory of the press then which differs dramatically from the mentality of its age may well be modified or scuttled altogether. The libertarian theory is at odds with the emergent world view which seems to be replacing the one which saw its inception.

The Libertarian theory of the press accommodated itself to the world view of the Enlightenment. The perpetual motion world of Newton was its basis, along with the natural right philosophy of John Locke. The doctrines of classical economics with their emphasis on a minimum of governmental interference and their faith that as men worked for their own self-interest they would also work for the common good was also an influence. John Milton's self-righting process holding that the truth would emerge from the free encounter of ideas in the marketplace was a factor.

The revolution in modern thought has all but demolished the world view which was supported by the Libertarian theory of the press. The emergent world view of the twentieth century is the Darwin-Einstein revolution, which has brought major changes in the thinking of the educated sections of society. The ideas which have undermined the Newtonian concept and of traditional theory are in closer accord with a collectivistic theory of society than the individualistic theory from which the libertarian theory sprang. At its extreme, the collectivistic theory of course is represented by totalitarianism--Fascism and Communism.

However, even a society which operates under the theory of the individual has within it elements of the collectivistic. The Social Responsibility theory of the press represents just such a blending of ideas. This is not to say that even in its extremes does social responsibility lead to collectivism. The theory poses social responsibility of the media as a safeguard against totalitarianism. The commission on Freedom of the Press has said that a great potential danger to freedom of the press lies in the notion that government can solve all the problems arising from the complexity of society, and from concentrations of power.

Can we rely on government to correct conditions within the press? If concentration of power becomes a threat to democracy, then agencies must control themselves, be broken up, or supervised by government.

Democratic capitalism also went through changes in the twentieth century. The belief that each entrepreneur would automatically serve the

common good as he selfishly pursued his own interests gave way to the belief that American business and industry must assume certain obligations to the community. "The public be damned" was replaced by the slogan "the consumer is king." At the same time, the press developed a sense of mission requiring it to serve the general welfare. As it did, it planted the seeds for a coherent theory of social responsibility.

A New Outlook.

It is hard to say when the new sense of Social Responsibility of the press began to take shape. As long as publishers were primarily printers they were not likely to concern themselves with social ethics. From the earliest years some men had been men of high resolve. By the middle of the nineteenth century journalism had begun to attract men of education and principle who set high standards for their craft and tried to live up to them. Some formed codes of ethics for their staffs. As it is today, the growing professional spirit was fostered in part by schools of journalism, which began springing up in the first years of this century. They not only taught the techniques of journalism but also in time showed an increasing concern with the responsibilities of the media.

This century saw publishers speaking more and more often of the duties which accompanied the prestigious position of the press under the constitution. Joseph Pulitzer championed such schools of journalism and prescribed codes of ethics for his staff--he said nothing but the highest ideals would do for the new profession.

In similar words, other publishers as the century moved on spoke of the need of high standards and Social Responsibility. Publishers in one major newspaper city spoke of the responsibilities monopolies imposed on them. They were joined by movie makers and radio-television professionals, although it might not seem that likely today with the violence and sex with those industries. Industry groups formed codes of ethical performance. And it was not just the large media outlets which spoke of the need of a responsible media. Radio and television came eventually under the control of the F.C.C.

Once it has been established that there is a movement toward social responsibility, a fork in the road confronts all participants. Down one road goes a theory of social responsibility as it is being evolved by the most articulate spokesmen for the press itself. Down the other fork goes the theory as it has been formulated in the most coherent form by the Commission on Freedom of the Press. Both roads head away from traditional libertarian theory, and they parallel one another for various distances at various places. The press was generally hostile to the report of the commission but its criticisms were not directed to the primary assumptions of the report. Few if any of the media took issue with the commission on the fundamental need that the press has a social responsibility. Even the function of a democratic press in contemporary society was accepted. The commission has said that it took most of its ideas from the professions in the communications industry itself.

What the press did criticize was the Commission's evaluation of press performance, which the press thought was not as bad as the Commission

depicted. The press replied that the nature of competition had changed, thus not endangering the free flow of ideas. The press rejected the Commission's position that the power of government over the media be extended.

The practitioners, in their professions and practices, contributed a good deal to the shaping of the theory, even though they may not agree with the logical extensions of the Commission's report.

Implicit in some of the early canons of the media are faith that man is primarily a rational creature, able to discover truth and to separate right from wrong by the power of reason. The canons also shared the belief that the newspaper is chiefly an instrument of enlightenment making its appeal to the critical sense of the reader. The canons seem to assume that the newspaper should promote democratic government by expediting the self-righting process. The assumption was made that the press can aid the workings of the self-righting process by striving for such ideals as truthfulness and fair play. The one new idea in such canons is that the press is responsible to the general welfare. Some of the early codes regarded man as essentially immature and as highly susceptible to the corruption of his morals. That is especially found in media other than newspapers. According to the Commission codes are not enough to insure the sort of press that society requires. The newspaper code was drawn up by employees, not employers. Responsibility has not been and cannot be enforced.

The Commission says that what is required by the press today are greater variety, quantity, and quality than at any other previous society in any age. One reason for this is man's heavy reliance on the press.

Urbanization has inhibited the face to face contact of earlier societies. Man must depend on the media for his news. Most of the discussion in today's society come in the press, not first hand experience. But along with advances in the press has come concentration in the hands of the few, and the consumer of news and ideas is largely at the mercy of the operators of the media.

Press Performance.

One of the requirements of the Commission is that the press be accurate. It must not lie. The press must identify fact as fact and opinion as opinion. No better evidence of this agreement and to the growing fidelity to the public interest is the development of objective reporting. There were economic reasons for the development of objective reporting as well, apart from a growing sense of professionalism. But there was a philosophical foundation as well. By separating news from comment, publishers were expediting the self-righting process. It was easier for the reader to discover the truth. By the time the Commission released its report in 1947, objectivity was no longer a goal of the press--it had become a fetish.

But a truthful, comprehensive account of the news is not enough. Two half-truths cannot make the truth. The truth must be placed in a certain context where the reader makes no mistake about its veracity. Printing the truth about the fact is another way of putting it. Putting into the one-dimensional story the other element which will get to the truth can be a dangerous business. It is a dilemma, but worth pursuing in today's

controversial market. A growing number of practitioners are subscribing to the view that merely reporting the news is insufficient. In broadcasting, Edward R. Murrow was one of the first to put into practice this theory.

The agencies of mass communication should regard themselves as common carriers of public discussion. The press should not make room for all applicants for space and the government should not regulate their rates. One cannot demand, as a right, that the press disseminate his ideas. (The case of the Unabomber's manifesto is an exception to this rule.) In simple terms, it means that the giants of the press should carry views contrary to their own without abdicating their own right to their own views. The press should identify all sources of news while representing all important viewpoints, not merely those which the publisher agrees. The reason for this outlook is that the press has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. No longer can an individual with something to say can start his own publication. Pamphlets are no longer a very effective means of communication. On this point the media seem to concur with the Commission.

"Common carriers" is the term most media use to describe themselves. Editors and publishers see their main function as conveying information. Freedom of the press cannot mean the license to keep people from knowing.

The growth of one-newspaper cities has been accompanied by an increased sense of duty to the communities they serve. They have a greater responsibility than ever to insure the free flow of information and ideas. Newspaper publishers are denied the luxury of refusing to deal with those

they dislike or of using their control of a medium to punish those who patronize a competitor.

Most newspaper and magazine workers would say that they represent the different segments of society, minorities of all kinds, by their conscientious effort to report the day's intelligence truthfully and impartially. The press must also present and clarify the goals and values of a society. Newsmen would respond that the function of a good editorial page takes care of this requirement. One could say that today any newspaper which promotes the goals and values of their society is being socially responsible. What does that say about the press of Iraq, for instance? Respecting accepted values and traditional virtues has always been a struggle for the other media, films and broadcasting.

A wide distribution of news and opinion must be made available to the public. The concept of "freedom of information" evolved out of this desire to serve as many in society as possible. The public has a right of access to information and to be informed. This idea marked a break with traditional theory, which assured the citizen access to the day's intelligence only by protecting freedom of expression. Traditional theory provided no legal tool for prying open the lips of the silent. During World War II a trend evolved which endangered freedom of the press. James Reston, among others, cautioned against the suppression of the news.

Improvements.

The press should assume the responsibilities of common carriers of information and discussion, and, like other professions, hold their newspeople to certain standards. They should experiment with high quality content which offers no immediate promise of financial return. Newspapers should engage in mutual criticism and should seek to improve the caliber of its personnel.

But, as mentioned earlier, the public too has certain obligations toward the press. A public awareness of the tremendous power of the mass media is needed. Power concentrated in too few hands should also warn the public to be on guard. The public must know the failings of the press to meet the needs of society. Once the public is aware of these limitations, it can act in ways to improve the press. Siebert, et al. (1973) suggests three things. First, nonprofit institutions should help the press carry out its required tasks. Colleges should stay involved. Educational institutions should create centers for advanced study, research, and critical publication in the field of mass communication. Third, an independent agency should be established to appraise press performance and to report on it each year.

The government must recognize that the press must remain a privately-owned business. It can nevertheless help to give its citizens the kind of communication system they require. The government can encourage new ventures. It can also adopt new legal remedies to change chronic abuses of press freedom. Finally, it can enter the communications field to supplement the privately-owned media.

Freedom.

The social responsibility theory of the press is based on a foundation of thought which has amended certain sections of Libertarian theory and which has largely rejected other theories. The concept of liberty which social responsibility represents is fundamentally different than traditional theory. Libertarian theory was born of a concept of negative liberty, which can be defined as "freedom from" and more aptly "freedom from external restraint." Social responsibility theory on the other hand rests on a concept of positive liberty, in other words "freedom for". This calls for the presence of the necessary implements for the attainment of a desired goal.

Negative liberty consisted of leaving the individual free to work out his own destiny. Man would discover the unchanging laws of the universe and by bringing his institutions into line with them. This was enough, then, to remove the restrictions on man. It was enough to remove all but a minimum of restrictions on the press. The press, if left alone, would feed information and ideas into the marketplace, and from that truth would emerge triumphant.

The Social Responsibility theory is grounded in a school of thought which sees purely negative theory as insufficient and ineffective. According to this approach, negative liberty is an empty liberty. To be real, freedom must be effective. It is not enough to tell a man he is free to pursue his goals. One must provide him the means of attaining those goals.

The Commission also says that effective freedom has its positive as well as its negative aspects. It boils down to freedom from and freedom for. A free

press is free from all compulsions, although not from all pressures. It must have financial strength, access to information, and so forth. Freedom for those who own the media is not the only concern of the commission. It is also concerned about citizens who possess a negative freedom of expression. This citizen's freedom too must be implemented by a press which carries viewpoints similar to his own. Media operated by the government or some non-profit agency must provide the citizen with the required services that the commercial press does not provide. As a result of today's affinity with "freedom of information," the press has been moving away from negative freedom. Negative liberty provided no means of extracting valuable information from government officials. In various states there has been a movement for sunshine laws, to open the business of government to the people.

The Press's Relationship With Government.

The Social Responsibility theory also differs from traditional theory in the view it takes on the operations of government. Libertarian theory came into being as a result of the state being seen as the chief foe of liberty. There were other threats to it also. John Stuart Mill knew the tyranny of the majority over a minority could be just as intrusive as the government. It could infringe upon an individual's freedom. Freedom came to mean freedom from the hold of the state. So Mill and others opted for the least government possible.

If one assured the freedom of the individual, then one assured the freedom of society. The theory of social responsibility holds that the government must not merely allow freedom, it must promote it. One function under traditional theory is to maintain order and personal security. But that is essentially a negative freedom and is not sufficient in modern societies. With its physical force, government is the only agency that can provide individual freedom. The government should act to protect the freedoms of its citizens when necessary. The commission recognized that the government had the main responsibility for an adequate press performance. The government may act in several ways. It may regulate to avoid the poisoning of the truth or it may enter the field of communications itself.

Even so, the press must still have a foundation in private enterprise. The government should intervene only when the need is great, such as wartime, and the stakes are high. It should not aim at competing with or eliminating with privately-held media. It must be kept in mind that an agency capable of the promotion of freedom can destroy it.

Expression.

According to Social Responsibility theory, freedom of expression is a moral right, with an aspect of duty intertwined. Thus in this aspect the theory differs from pure libertarian theory. Under Libertarian theory, freedom of expression was a natural right, a right which man was both with, a right which no one could take away. Although this right might be temporarily prevented, no duty was attached to the right. As has been written above, the

assumption was that free men would voice their ideas and that other free men would listen. Given the nature of man, it was inconceivable that men would not share information and ideas. It was also founded on utility--it was justified because free speech and a free press would promote the victory of truth in the marketplace of ideas.

In social responsibility theory, freedom of expression is based on the duty of the individual to his thought, his conscience. It is a moral right, one that cannot be taken away. If one claims freedom of expression as a right, one must honor the right of others to self-expression. If man yields his claim, then he weakens the claims of others. Freedom of expression is not something which one claims for selfish ends. From a psychological perspective, it is so closely bound up with his mental existence and growth that he ought to claim it. It has value both for the individual and for society. It is the individual's means of perpetuating himself through his idea. It is society's sole source of intelligence. From those seeds springs progress.

Free expression has an aspect of duty about it. He owes speaking up to his conscience and to the common good. It is his duty to something beyond the community--to the truth. This duty to his conscience is the primary basis of the right of free expression under social responsibility theory.

The Commission sees it as a logical step from the traditional justification of free expression on the grounds of utility. Whatever discussion arises comes from this duty to man's conscience.

The citizen cannot however demand the free right to the publication of his ideas. He has no right to reach any of the mass media. He cannot demand

that a newspaper print what he wants printed, what he has to say. Freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right. The Commission saw a need for limitation. The right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against important social interests.

Traditional theory had been modified long before the Commission on Freedom of the Press came along. The press itself acknowledged that considerations of public welfare could override the right to free speech. Man has a moral right to free expression only if he assumes the concomitant right that goes along with it. He breaches that right when he lies, libels, or disregards the truth.

The moral right to free expression does however contain another right--the right to error. There are at least two good reasons for tolerating error. One is that the theory requires a certain amount of freedom to get at the truth. Liberty is experimental, and the search for the truth requires trial and error. A second reason is that each individual has the right to search for the truth himself, not have it imposed on him. But the moral right covers only honest error.

In the link between rights and duties, social responsibility is closer in thought to the Soviet system than to libertarian thought. Under Soviet theory, the duty is to the proletariat, not an individual's own conscience. But the legal right to free expression under the social responsibility theory is not unconditional. Even libertarian theory imposed certain restraints, such as the

laws for libel. All of those restrictions were based on one common principle. It was the failure to recognize private rights or the vital needs of society.

The nature of man was viewed differently by Libertarian theory than by the theory for Social Responsibility. Under Libertarian philosophy, even the most preposterous idea could be given voice. Given the freedom to speak, man would speak. There was no need to remind publishers of their responsibilities. It was a moral sense that gave them their duty. No one needed to worry about the publisher who lied or distorted. Other publishers would find it profitable to expose him. The public would put his words to the powerful test of reason.

Self-Righting Process.

Social Responsibility theory puts far less faith in the self-righting process than does Libertarian theory. Milton would have subjected all to the test of free debate. Mill and Jefferson would have exempted not even first principles. Their conviction that truth would rise above all else from the clash of ideas is not justified in contemporary society. According to the Commission, actualities do not support the classical position. Firstly, there is no assurance that idea will clash against idea in any real contest. Secondly, few citizens search for ideas which attack those they already hold. The Commission said that as long as the will to find truth is undiscouraged and lively, free expression tends to produce a stronger and more self-conscious citizenry.

One can only speculate on what is meant by truth for the Commission hardly makes reference to it. To the libertarians, truth was an absolute, capable of discovery through the free interchange of discovery.

The Commission appears to value free expression chiefly because it promotes the harmonious, fruitful society. As Mill suggested, man, free to express himself, free to exchange ideas with his neighbors, grows in dignity and develops to his fullest capabilities. This is not unlike the psychological teachings of Maslow, for instance. If free expression does not lead to the discovery of an absolute truth, it can at least lead to the discovery of a number of lesser truths, which enable men to lead rich and peaceful lives.

The value of free expression is that it raises social conflict from the plane of violence to the plane of discussion, as the Commission has put it.

This then ends our discussion of social responsible theory. Whether or not one agrees with the Commission, however, one conclusion is evident--pure libertarian theory is obsolete, as the press as a whole has recognized. Taking its place is a challenging, emerging theory.

The Right of Privacy

Gilmore and Root (1976) described the right of privacy, as a "delicate thing." They wrote that privacy is more than a question of law. The newspaper can probably get by if its publication of personal matter is closely related to news events. Sometimes press ethics may halt an invasion of privacy which law would permit.

Newspersons may have to remind themselves not to be too "hard-boiled" on the question. Much of their most important work is always close to invading someone's privacy.

Ordinary persons, according to Gilmore and Root (1976), as distinguished from politicians and celebrities, have great sensitivity about "undue publicity." The authors cite a case where a mother was incensed because the media printed a report that a teenager had shot her passing car with a BB-gun.

The shooting became public record because it was a misdemeanor. The editor in charge saw many reasons for printing the story. For one, the public could judge whether juveniles are delinquent. Other factor included whether the neighborhood had gangs, whether or not the police were doing their job, and whether guns should be controlled.

The mother could appreciate none of these arguments. She saw no reason why her age should be printed, for instance. She also feared that the teenager, knowing her name, would "get back" at her or her children. Was this a silly situation? The answer would be "yes" from the editor's point of view. But from the point of view of privacy and her feeling about press invasions, it was h~~e~~r own business whether she was shot at.

This particular woman/victim wanted to be more than grist for "a couple of grafs." The authors warn that such ordinary citizens may have such "unreasonable" feelings.

Princess Diana

But what of unordinary citizens--Princess Diana of Wales for instance. As Tad Bartimus wrote in the San Francisco Examiner issue of August 31, 1998- Tad was a bureau chief and correspondent for the Associated Press for 25 years. Princess Diana was beautiful, vulnerable, manipulative, embodying all our fairy tales and nightmares (Bartimus, 1998).

She wasn't just manipulative, however. She was manipulated by the press, perhaps unlike any other woman in the press spotlight. Her world of royalty was turned upside down by the continued perusal of the press.

Bartimus writes that the princess "was an innocent upon who the British Royal family had settled as a suitable brood mare for its emotionally constricted heir" (Bartimus, 1998 p.A-17). She had little education, no friends inside the palace, and was very naive. Bartimus wrote that "she took her prince's hand and followed him right off the cliff" (p.A-17).

The public watched as Diana struggled to find herself. There were times when she would go down blind alleys. She has bulimia, attempted suicide, and was extravagant. She was the most photographed woman in the world and every piece of clothing she wore was scrutinized. "The miracle was," Bartimus wrote, "that she kept going--slowly making progress until she began to trust herself." (Bartimus, 1998 p.A-17) Diana got healthy, partly by shedding disloyal hangers-on. She helped the poor and the homeless and was not afraid to hold a sick child in her hand. She stopped being a "wrist ornament, and became a powerful force who shrewdly wielded power and influence" (Bartimus, 1998 p.A-17).

All along her route she was hounded by the press and free-lance photographers. The press seemed to want to know everything about the Princess--details about her relationship with the Prince. The press even asked her about the details of her wedding night. All along she was constantly in the mirror of the press through hundreds, perhaps thousands, of photographs.

Her working life will be remembered, for it was a product of her own initiative, the product of her own hands. Diana had joy in her short life--from her children, her few real friends, and from her sisters and brothers.

Princess Diana was killed in a Paris car accident on August 31, 1997. Her death traumatized Britain. She was killed with her companion at the time, Dodi Fayed, and their driver, Henri Paul. She died in the early morning hours, and the press still focused on her in death, even more so. In fact, photographers following their car were said to have been the cause of the accident. They were later cleared of wrongdoing. Just at her moment of perhaps true happiness, she dies underneath the blaze of photographer's lightbulbs.

Diana suffered from a press that pried too closely into her personal life. Although she often used the media for her own gains, the weight of the press bore down on her until she finally asked photographers to leave her and her children alone.

Three days before the anniversary of Diana's death, the San Jose Mercury News ran three long stories about her life, testament to the fact that even in death the press can't get enough of her. ("Diana," 1998)

In one of those stories, written by Bill Glauber of the Associated Press, the author wrote, "When Britons turned on their radio and television sets and heard the familiar strains of 'God Save the Queen,' they instinctively knew that there had been a death in the royal family." ("Diana," 1998 p.1)

Glauber wrote that most people had never met Diana. They only knew her through tabloid magazines, newspapers, and television interviews.

And yet they grieved, for a princess, and for themselves.

At her death, A. A. Gill wrote last September in the Sunday Times of London, "What Diana left us with is a profound sense of our own untidy, embarrassing, contradictory, capricious humanity--a sense that it is our weaknesses that make us precious, not our strength." ("Diana," 1998 p.1)

Diana's death created an academic niche, Glauber wrote, ("Diana," 1998) as professors, commentators and writers dissected her life and times point by point, with papers prepared on such subjects as Diana as a feminist icon and Diana and the nation.

Others focused on Britain's public outpouring of grief. Even in death the press could not get enough of her.

Conflict of Interest

Christians et al. (1995) cited a quote by the Wall Street Journal who once argued that "A newspaper is private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk" (p.31).

Although this is an extreme statement, over the last two centuries many American publishers and broadcasters have shared this attitude. The individual's right to publish has been a strongly held convention.

The mood may be shifting somewhat, at least in theory. News, not widgets, is their business. Journalism is in fact a business, but in the light of the First Amendment it is a business of a particular kind.

Christians et al. (1995) wrote that in actual practice, it becomes more difficult to separate the media's financial interests from the public's legitimate news interests. He wrote that nothing is more difficult in the mass media than promoting the public good, even though the rewards are not commensurate with such altruism.

The news is under constant control and is at the perpetual risk of corporate control. The conflict between the public's need for information and the stockholders need for profit is not inevitable.

Two moral questions might be the need to earn a respectable income and deciding to stop a dead-ended investigation. For instance, without a press pool to help pay expenses for a charter, a minor party candidate could not conduct a modern campaign. One person serving in two potentially conflicting capacities, may indeed by working ethically.

Nevertheless, ever since mass communications took on the character of big business there have been built-in commercial pressures. As the trend toward concentrated ownership continues, cost-conscious publishers threaten to overwhelm the press's noble mission.

One case Christians et al. (1995) cites is called "Civic Duties in Lewiston", a case that considers potential conflicts of interest between employment and activity in community affairs. (Christians et al., 1995)

Christians et al. (1995) describes the Lewiston (Idaho) Morning Tribune as it recently took a look at the community interests of its staff. Christians et al. (1995) argues by asking the question of whether or not the journalist should exercise the right and responsibilities of citizenship by participating in civic and political affairs. Perhaps, they wrote, he/she should remain above the fray as a neutral observer. By taking the first course, the newsperson is in danger of conflict. There is the potential for social isolation and sterility in the second.

The publisher had the lengthiest list of civic involvement. He belonged to several organizations in the county and sat on the board of the Idaho First National Bank. The newspapers editorial-page editor had recently returned to the paper after six months work as press secretary of Idaho Senator Frank Church. he had various other alliances.

A similar list could be drawn up for the staffs on most newspapers, particularly the smaller ones. The Morning Tribune follows standard policy. Staff members do not report on their own activities. Those who draw their assignments are aware they are reporting on the performance of their friend or co-worker, or on the performance of their bosses. For example, how many times does a reporter hear from an editor, "Gee, I'd like to see this get in the paper."

Most of the problems in this case come from potential role conflicts. The journalist's role as practitioner may at times contradict the journalist's role as citizen.

News as free from bias is the good a journalist can achieve. The good a citizen can achieve, on the other hand, is the social service that comes from responsible citizenship. Should journalists sacrifice their role as contributing citizens in order to be journalists, or whether the conflicts in this case are more apparent than real.

Christians et al. (1995) noted that it can be reasonably argued that the organizational memberships themselves are not a significant source of biased journalism. The reporter might show bias whether on a committee or not. Resignation from that job would be essentially cosmetic since he/she would likely retain their political affiliation.

Research Questions

- 1) Is the Social Responsibility theory important to journalists?
- 2) What would the press be like without Social Responsibility/Civic Journalism?
- 3) In what ways can the theory help?
- 4) Is the theory still valid and relevant?
- 5) Can a theory help guide journalists?
- 6) Will SR theory have an effect on future journalism?

Literature Review vs. Research Questions

Most of the literature review argues for self-responsibility of the press. If the press doesn't control itself from within and set standards for itself, then some action will be taken from outside the industry to "clean up" the situation.

One of the writer's research questions dealt with the importance of Social Responsibility theory. The Hutchins Commission report certainly gives a high profile to the responsibilities mentioned within it. Were it not for the report, there might not be a theory on the Social Responsibility of the press.

So the literature shows, not just the Hutchins Commission, but all the authors cited, that the subject is of strong importance to those who practice in the media. Whether one is talking about "circles of control" or Libertarian theory, one gets the picture that the theory is indeed important to today's journalists.

As stated above the press would be in a difficult situation were it not for such controls from within as in the Social Responsibility of the press. So a world without the first Amendment and controls from within the world of publishers, would lead to a press very unlike the system we have now.

The theory gives specifics to guide editors and publishers, as well as reporters. The six tenets of the theory have been spun off into different directions by writers quoted.

The theory, the writer believes, is still valid and relevant in today's competitive market. Its effect on the future remains to be seen, but most authors feel that things are going in the right direction, and that the press today is more responsible than ever.

Chapter III

Method

The method of choice for this thesis is the case study. A helpful method of analysis, it generally gets good results. The method of research is qualitative, not quantitative.

Methodology

Yin (1994) wrote that such sources of evidence (such as pattern matching, observation, etc.) can and have been the sole basis for entire studies. He wrote that this isolated use of sources may be a function of the independent way that sources have typically been conceived--as if an investigator should choose the single most appropriate source of the one which he or she is the most familiar.

Yin (1994) explained that on many an occasion, investigators have announced the design of a new study by identifying both the problem to be studied and the selection of a single source of evidence--such as interviews. This would be the focus of the data collection effort.

Like Yin in this case, this researcher has but one source of data for his evaluation.

The method selected for this study were telephone interviews of up to four news personnel at two different Bay Area newspapers, one large and one small. The papers were the San Francisco Examiner and the Gilroy Dispatch.

Both papers were compared for their differences and similarities. The choice of phone interviews on a local basis was justified by cost and time limitations. Triangulation of sources should be achieved by a combination of literature, focus group interviews, and participant observation. The researcher looked at pattern matching.

The hypothesis for this study concerns itself with the knowledge editors/gatekeepers hold in regard to Social Responsibility or a sense of Civic Journalism. The hypothesis is that these news personnel do in fact have a working knowledge of the theory and all its spin-offs.

Additional Data Collection: Two college professors familiar with the field of media ethics were interviewed by telephone for their particular insights into the hypothesis.

Data Analysis: It may be that the respondents did not have a clear idea about the six tenets of Social Responsibility Theory. But the writer is sure the respondents had a good idea about social responsibility/civic journalism in general. Thus, the hypothesis will not be discarded if it can be proven that a "sense" of Social Responsibility exists. The researcher looked for pattern in his research as suggested by Yin (1994), in his text on case study research. The writer is primarily interested in the effect the Social Responsibility concept has on the day-to-day thinking of managing editors. Managing editors are ideal because they not only deal with editorial decisions, but must take into consideration economic questions as well, such as profit, budgeting, etc.

Further Research

One has only to look at the past few months to appreciate the rift with the public over matters of truthfulness, invasion of privacy, and overall trustworthiness of the press. The writer wants to increase the effort at finding a link between social responsibility and daily actions by members of the press. Further research, surely qualitative but also quantitative, could help in this area given the lack of time and resources available to the writer.

Limitations of the Study

Had the writer been able to arrange face-to-face interviews the study would have been more of an observant-participant exercise which would have revealed such things as body language, etc.

Justification of Method

Telephone interviews were the most convenient, least costly, and easiest method for this thesis. It avoided the long drives to Gilroy and San Francisco, and yet provided an intimate setting where the subject was comfortable in his/her own surroundings. Talking to two of the subjects at home, the communications professors, was the best possible environment for interviews. It was quiet and the feeling of "being home" seemed to help in the frankness of the interviews.

The first method of choice was focus groups of up to four individuals. This didn't work out because the first newspaper the writer contacted, The

Santa Cruz Sentinal, objected to the group format and the interviews themselves. Face-to-face interviews would have allowed more revealing testimony from the subjects, but the subjects seemed to rely on phone conversations as the method of choice.

Telephone interviews are not as rewarding as face-to-face interviews, but at the very least the writer can "record" vocal inflections and emphasis on certain words and concepts.

Qualitative Method

The qualitative method of research allows the researcher much more freedom to make subjective judgment that can be verified, rather than deal with statistical data which is best reserved for a large study. The writer can be a participant-observer or can observe but not participate. One "listens" during the qualitative approach, one "feels" if the researcher has the opportunity for face-to-face interviews. The researcher should be flexible, so that he/she doesn't influence.

The writer has chosen Yin's (1994) single source for his research, though multiple resources would have aided the study.

Yin (1994) stated that the essence of the case study goes beyond the qualitative method. He wrote that as a related but important note, case studies should not be confused with the burgeoning use of qualitative research (Yin, 1994).

The essence of qualitative research, he said, consists of two conditions:

- 1) The use of the close-up, detailed observation of the natural world by the

investigator, and 2) the attempt to avoid prior commitment to any theoretical model. (Yin, 1994)

Case studies have a distinctive role in evaluation research. The most important application is to explain. A second application is to describe the real-life context in which an intervention has occurred. Lastly, the case study strategy may be used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 1994).

Sometimes methodological research of qualitative analysis can lead to a sequence or "time-series," which is another valuable tool in case study research. In general, however, a more complex time series creates greater problems for data collection.

For case study analysis, one of the most desirable strategies is pattern-matching logic.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Telephone interviews are quick and immediate. They allow you to get into a person's reasoning in a hurry. Unfortunately, as has been said, you don't get the whole picture of the person such as facial expressions and body movement. Subjects tend to be less open and more careful when they are on the phone rather than an in-person interview. Some subjects are not used to phone conversations on their job. Your call may be the only one received all day.

Yin (1994) wrote that for case-study analysis, one of the most desirable strategies is the use of a pattern matching logic. He wrote that such a logic

compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. Most of the writer's assumptions about the use of the theory came out to be correct. Pattern-matching confirms what your hypothesis is, or aids in that direction.

Yin (1994) wrote that if the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity. Yin wrote that at this state of the art, the actual pattern-matching procedure involves no precise comparisons.

This lack of precision can allow for some interpretive discretion on the part of the investigator, who may be overly restrictive in claiming a pattern to have been violated or overly lenient in deciding that a pattern has been matched.

The only real weakness the writer found in his research was the lack of face-to-face contact, which blocked the natural give and take of most interviews and blunted the tool of direct observation.

The following subjects were interviewed at random for this thesis. Most if not all, were very cooperative.

The Participants

The Gilroy Dispatch, Gilroy, Ca.

Mark Derry, managing Editor, 15 years at the Dispatch.

Bill Satterly, city editor, approximately two years experience at the Dispatch.

Jane Hefeldine, reporter, seven years experience as a reporter.

The Santa Clara Weekly, Santa Clara, Ca.

Linda Feldman, Managing Editor. Written for McCall's and Rolling Stone.

The San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco, Ca.

Phil Bronstein, Executive Editor, seven years as executive editor.

Sharon Rosenhouse, Managing Editor, approximately three years in current position.

Mike Munzell, Editor, several years experience in the field.

Lance Williams, investigative reporter. Many years with the Examiner.

University of South Florida

Dr. Jay Black, professor of Communications.

Brigham Young University

Dr. Ralph Barney, professor emeritus of Communications.

Chapter IV

RESULTS/FINDINGS

This chapter of the thesis describes the responses the writer received from the 10 subjects interviewed. It also contains pattern-matching results which validate the writer's hypothesis.

Interviewing Method

The writer interviewed by telephone six editors, two reporters, and two professors of Communications for the basic research of this thesis. The editors and reporters were contacted at their offices, at the San Francisco Examiner and the Gilroy Dispatch, respectively. Because the Dispatch did not have another editor that the writer could interview, he contacted the Santa Clara Weekly where he interviewed the weekly's managing editor. The interview calls were made during business hours with respect to the editors and reporters. The telephone interviews were conducted with the two communications professors after hours, at their homes.

There was some interaction with the respondees, especially the professors. When dealing with the editors and reporters, time constraints played a role in the interviews. Consequently, the interviews were straightforward and as brief as possible, given their heavy work schedule. However, the writer feels that he received as much information as he could have from a busy newspaper staff. The interviews with the two professors were longer. One telephone interview to Florida took 25 minutes while the

other call to Utah took 45 minutes, which was the longest of any telephone call.

Usually, the writer was able to get through to the editors and especially the reporters on the first try. it was more difficult at the San Francisco Examiner, where the managing editor had to call me back. The only time the writer felt that he was imposing on anyone was at the Dispatch, where the managing editor was at first reluctant to talk. Overall, it took about two weeks to complete the interviews.

The 10 interviewees were asked for their comments on the six tenets of Social Responsibility theory as derived from the Hutchins Commission or the Commission on Freedom of the Press. The tenets, and the responses to them, follow.

1) Service the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on political affairs.

Derry: Is more free-flowing information needed in the news business? Derry doesn't think so. He thinks the industry is suffering from information overload. He said that this is unfortunate. Derry believes in presenting significant information, what people should know. Significant information is all Derry wants. "Enough is enough," he said.

Satterly: This city editor believes the best way of servicing the political system is through the editorial pages of the newspaper. By providing information, discussion, and debate a paper can endorse a candidate, thus also serving the electoral process at the same time. This is something that cannot

be done objectively. "Yeah," he said, "I believe in all the things mentioned in the first tenet."

Hafeldine: This political reporter says she doesn't think a lot about social responsibility theory. She's too busy getting the story. The seriousness of her voice plus her enthusiasm suggests she is very serious about her job. For this reporter, it is very important to get both sides of an issue. She cited the problem of a housing shortage in Gilroy as an example of an issue that needs to show both sides. Letters to the editor are the best way of achieving discussion with the public. The only time she has contact with the public directly is when special interest groups contact her. She said she feels a special chemistry with her readership as a whole, however.

Feldman: The Santa Clara Weekly's managing editor feels that a newspaper is not a service. It should not serve people in power, the political establishment for instance. Providing information to the public is the newspaper's job in default, she said. She said it was not enough to provide information. What the newspaper prints must be fair.

Bronstein: The executive editor feels that his reporters and editors should bring their own opinions to their job of providing information. Providing information, discussion, and debate is not enough, he said. In this area newsmen must have keep awareness. That awareness is built on a knowledge of people, the audience. Editors and reporters must use their judgment. Bronstein doesn't argue with the free flow of information, he just wants "more" from his editors and reporters.

Rosenhouse: Rosenhouse sees her job as mainly providing information to the public, so she agrees with the first tenet. She has "no problem" with providing information, it is non-controversial for her. She was less clear about providing debate and discussion. She did say that a newspaper is either socially responsible or not. There can be no two ways about it, she said. You've got to get both sides of an issue.

Munzell: The chief copy editor, who did not want to give his age ("List me as a adult"), sees the free flow of information as a way to service voters and thus serve government at the same time. Newspapers, he said must print both fact and truth. This factor sparks both debate and discussion. It sometimes jolts a reader into unknown territory (causing one to think) and thus is a keystone for democracy.

Williams: Providing information, discussion, and debate are "core values," according to the investigative reporter. He said it was a major reason his paper ran stories on politics and government. The founders were wise enough to protect free speech, he said. Williams hopes readers will analyze and eventually understand the issues surrounding them through his investigative reporting.

Dr. Black: Black, like Williams, sees the first tenet as the "core of the enterprise." Discourse, he said, is somewhat of a "fuzzy notion." But it is built into the system of communication. Black also feels that surveillance and being a watchdog should be part of this tenet.

Dr. Barney: Barney suggested that the free flow of information, debate, and discussion are antecedent functions of journalism. "How do you arrive at a

set of things to do?" he asked. His response was, "You can't tell." You can't tell the media what to do he said. It's a poor way to structure a system when there have been laws that have been passed, he said. It's fine except one is carrying an axe over his shoulder in order for conformity to exist. Laws would have to be passed, he said. In an extreme situation, he said, look to the First Amendment. Journalists must protect citizens, not the media itself. The population needs to be protected and the press needs to do "certain things," he said. There is a disproportionate amount of power in this country, he said. There also is a concentration of power in the hands of a few.

2) Enlighten the public to make it capable of self-government.

Derry: "The newspaper should be a bridge for debate and discussion," he said. It should be a bridge to enlightening the public. He sees the newspaper as a forum, an opportunity to comment and explain. he said it is up to the editor to decide which news to work on. Reporters must do the same, he said. Debate and discussion (tying in tenet one) are Derry's way of enlightening the public.

Satterly: Satterly believes in the second tenet. He believes journalists should enlighten the public when it can. Although, like his boss, he does not believe in just enlightenment. "Make the reader make judgments," he said. Get both sides to a story and make it an unbiased story, he said. The city editor strives for balance in his paper's stories. That way he can help the reader have informed discussions on important issues. People should act of their own informed decisions, and not serve up one-scale information.

Hafeldine: This star reporter's "special chemistry" with her readers is just basically an affection for them, born out of her personality and love of job. In the area of self-government, she believes that communities should be self-sufficient and handle their own problems. Whether it is taking back the streets or other local issues, Hafeldine stresses the need for people to solve their own problems. A newspaper can help in problem-solving, she says. To the extent that this is enlightenment, this reporter is not clear. She does believe that elections are an important part of the problem and that a newspaper can highlight opinions and issues.

Feldman: Enlightening the public is, in Feldman's words, "much too lofty for my blood." (The writer heard the same language from another editor of a small newspaper.) Feldman said a newspaper must be fair, provide news, inform, and sometimes act as a provocative weapon. She stressed fairness and professionalism. She talked of educating the public but was confused by the term "enlightenment," as if it didn't apply in her particular case.

Bronstein: According to Bronstein, the second tenet of the theory assumes that the public is not enlightened and needs a helping hand. A newspaper can provide the information to help the public be capable of self-government. Bronstein replied that responsible reporting is the key here. Newspapers can give people only just so much, he said. Interpretive reporting and editing can help here, he said. Bronstein didn't mention elections in the

interview, which the writer thought odd, since his paper does an extensive job in this particular area.

Rosenhause: Rosenhause feels that enlightening the public is a tenet to believe in. She sees newspapering as a field that can help people understand problems and issues.

Munzell: Reinforcing the values of society is one way a newspaper can help a society be capable of self-government. This does not mean, he said, of enlightening in a spiritual way. He said we have religions for that.

Williams: We believe that a society is capable of self-government, Williams said. The press plays an important role that allows self-government. It's part, or should be part, of our mission statement. "We're not really doing our jobs, he said, unless we help people to self-govern.

Dr. Black: Enlightening the people to make them capable of self-government is a "pluralistic notion" said Dr. Black. The Hutchins Commission favored comment and discussion to control government (tenet three). News is at the center of the democratic process, Black said. It is an irreversible process and can be dangerous if not watched, he said.

Dr. Barney: Should the press enlighten the people to make them capable of self-government? Barney thinks this question is dependent on one's knowledge of the global situation. Dr. Barney believes that the public should be better informed. There's some education that has to be done, he said. But media cannot be the single source of education/enlightenment. Dr. Barney sees "living one's life" as the basic key to enlightenment.

3) Safeguard the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government.

Derry: The managing editor takes seriously the safeguarding of peoples right, especially when it comes to government and the wasting of money. His paper covers everything from local government to garbage collection. His editors are watchdogs, but more importantly, it is the reporters on their beats who collaboratively struggle to keep an eye on the ramifications of their daily government beats.

Satterly: Satterly sees "Watergate" as the best example of a news organization being a watchdog against government. We must protect readers, he said, against undo excesses of government. This can be done at a local level. The Dispatch covers Santa Clara County, city council, board of supervisors, the school/college boards, and other governmental business. "We must cover these areas for the reader and they must not be hyped," he said. Satterly is also concerned with governmental censorship and fears limitations imposed on the press by government.

Hafeldine: Hafeldine thinks that in a small town such as Gilroy it is especially important that a newspaper keep an eye on government, in Hafeldine's case, local government. It is the paid employees that the reporter likes to focus on, so that the community isn't "ripped off." The reporter has done several investigative pieces that have turned out well for her paper, and the community. She investigated a gravel company's use of public land, a real David vs. Goliath issue. The company was cheating the public out of its gravel,

basically. The company eventually had to move elsewhere for its gravel source. She said it does make a difference to get the information out, especially with a small town, special interests, and small companies. "The money adds up," she said. Hafeldine investigated a county sheriff who had false endorsements for a coming election. The sheriff had committed an ethical violation and, because of her story, was not re-elected.

Feldman: Feldman believes the government is something the people need in order to function. But she also believes there is too much government. She said a newspaper should cover all government and all agencies, but fairly. Government is a body that keeps people from falling, she said. One must be skeptical, however.

Bronstein: Bronstein said that being a watchdog against government is "a fundamental part of our business". But Bronstein needs resources to cover, for instance, national governmental policies. "That is a job that the New York Times can do better than we can," he said. But he still believes in shining a bright light on public institutions.

Rosenhouse: The managing editor agreed with her boss on the watchdog question. According to her, it is a direct function of a newspaper. She generally finds features as the best way of sifting through the workings of government. In this area, she said, there is "too much, too little."

Munzell: In response to the third tenet, Munzell said that government should never abuse its powers over its people. Nobody, he said, gave the press

the right to govern either, but newspapers can present or cover issues regarding the government in a fair and truthful way.

Williams: Williams cited the Constitution with its sets of check and balances. "But the press is a fourth player at the table," he said. The press has the freedom to comment. He said the press must check the power of the machines of government. But the press must be careful of libel, he cautioned. Most of the government he deals with is local. That's where he can be a watchdog. he added, "Reporters are part of the community they serve. They must filter all that goes on around them"

Dr. Black: Black said that by spending 25 cents on a newspaper the public is being a watchdog against government. Those not formally elected by the voter can instead be elected by news coverage. The press is an agency of checks and balances, he said. There is a bias in serving democracy, he said. One must pressure government.

Dr. Barney: Barney thinks that the safeguard notion of social responsibility theory is "a bit vague." Some newspapers do not serve as a watchdog or monitor of government. There's no implication of a rightwing conspiracy here, he said. These six responsibility tenets are pretty fair, he said. He'd like to see more pluralism in journalism and hopes for more media outlets.

4) Service the economic system by bringing together the buyers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.

Derry: Derry is an executive editor. That means he is interested in profit and commerce. He said that advertising is "part of the business," you

can't avoid the fact that newspapers take in advertising for profit. Derry sees news value in ad display. The paper is read for the advertising as well as the news, he said. "Advertising is news in its own way," he said. He shrugs off the popular disdain for advertising. He sees advertising as a way of reaching people.

Satterly: When it comes to the need for advertising and to bring the forces of the market together, Satterly thinks that they should remain separate departments on the paper. Advertising is a legitimate part of the newspaper, he said. Satterly has never had to "kill" a story under pressure from one of his paper's advertisers.

Hafeldine: The reporter has seen problems with advertisers at her paper. A cable company once pulled its ads for a period of time. She talked mostly of special interest pressure (see tenet six). She's not worried about advertising because of her "great editor who has a lot of heart."

Feldman: Feldman, who did not reveal if she had a journalism school background, surprised the writer when she said that "no one's thinking about this tenet." She said her paper naturally does have advertising. But advertising is not part of journalism, she said. She said she is a realist about the problem, she said. When it comes to getting a great story, you need a certain amount of dollars to do that. Advertising, she said, has no place in the thought processes of an editor or reporter.

Bronstein: "It's not our job to bring together advertisers and buyers," he said. He said there is no fundamental place for advertisers in a news

operation. The writer believes he meant to say that the advertising department had no reason to concern itself with what went on in a newsroom. He concedes however that advertising is part of the publishing business. If a writer does a piece on one of the newspapers advertisers, that piece must have credibility, he said. "You need a good sense of business to be in publishing," he said.

Rosenhause: When it comes to advertising, Rosenhause has no qualms about this area either. "It pays the bills," she said. She doubts that a paper could survive without the revenue (see tenet six).

Munzell: The editor has no problem bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods through the medium of advertising. He said however that sometimes an advertiser will get mad at a newspaper for a certain policy. It happens all the time, he said.

Williams: He said advertising is how the paper makes money. He sees it as a "duty," to bring the market together. He'd like to try it sometime without the ads, he said. There are no core values here, he said, and it leads to a petty culture.

Dr. Black: The professor sees advertising as something that "pays the piper." It should not be seen as some kind of evil. It is important not to knuckle under to the MBA's in this world, a statement that could also apply to tenet six.

Dr. Barney: Dr. Barney wants to see a broad spectrum of advertisers as well as a more pluralistic newspaper output of ideas and issues. Choices enhance everything, Barney said. Advertising gives the public so many options, he said. The public must be able to learn how to select better for their own good.

5) Provide the readership with entertainment.

Derry: Derry had very little to say about entertainment. He said that the newspaper should entertain along with informing and educating. This means that his paper will run everything from columnists to "people stories" to crossword puzzles, he said.

Satterly: Entertainment doesn't seem to be a top priority for the city editor. Although he believes that features are the best way to go, he is more concerned with balance rather than pure entertainment. Friday is the day the Dispatch devotes some of its pages to entertainment. That's when the theater listings run. The editor wants variety. Sports are also seen as a form of entertainment. But the Dispatch has few resources in this area and can't compete with such papers as the San Jose Mercury News.

Hafeldine: Hafeldine also sees entertainment as a non-priority part of her newspaper. She maintains that features are entertaining, or can be. The Dispatch does cover art on occasion.

Feldman: Feldman sees nothing wrong with "lightening your product." She said entertainment helps a community know where it is and where they live, not, she said, in a distant part of Alaska. News doesn't necessarily set out

to entertain. You should also be able to write a piece on the opening of a piece of real estate, she said.

Bronstein: The Examiner's editor has no problem with entertaining his readers. But the piece must inform as well as entertain. He would even not argue over whether or not a piece was shocking or outrageous.

Rosenhause: Rosenhause is a little bit more positive than the other participants when it comes to providing entertainment. She sees entertainment as a viable function of a newspaper. She thinks that newspapers must entertain, or they will die. Newspapers, she said, are part of the social fabric of a readership.

Munzell: The editor sees entertainment news as the best form for communicating entertainment. It's a component of the business, he said. Calendars, comics, Sunday features, and reviews should be included in a paper's make up.

Williams: Williams sees no public service reason to provide entertainment. Williams believes that it is part of a newspaper's mission to provide entertainment ads so that the public can choose what it wants to see. It's also a way of building revenue for the paper (see next tenet).

Dr. Black: Entertainment is something that appeals to the lowest common denominator, Black says. However, he sees it as a way of bringing in media dollars. "Entertainment is obvious," said Dr. Black. It is akin to play theory, where cognitive needs take over daily needs and wants. He said it is

usually surrounded in a positive setting. Black said that when it comes to entertainment, we are our own gatekeepers.

Dr. Barney: "Sounds good," Barney said, when asked about entertainment in a paper. Newspapers however do not necessarily need to present entertainment. Barney sees a push today in the news business to use entertainment. But, he said, attention must be kept on the audience, the people who buy the newspaper. Comics, features, and reviews are all good things, he said. Some organizations don't even do news, he said. The market says we should use entertainment also, Barney said. But he sees a trend away from straight news to entertainment, and this bothers him. Many papers are losing sight of the news in their coverage today. "You'd be surprised," he said, "at the number of people who don't read."

6) Maintain its own financial self-sufficiency to be free from the pressures of special interests.

Derry; The newspaper should be strong, healthy, and "stable," he said. The paper must be independent enough to withstand the pressures of local advertisers, which is always a constant threat, and the force of the readership itself, when they raise concerns. Staff members too can become vulnerable to outside pressures, and the paper must be strong enough in this area to help out.

Satterly: Satterly concedes that a paper must be financially healthy to oppose the forces of special interests. The advertising department must be separate from the newsroom, however. There is less of a problem for everyone when the newspaper is healthy, he said.

Hafeldine: She insists that a reporter is not in "a business." The only thing she had to say about a sound newspaper is that they should pay their reporters.

Feldman: A newspaper, she said, must be free as possible from all self-interests. But she said that only a handful of newspapers is healthy enough to go their own way. Not everyone can be like the Los Angeles Times, which has 250 reporters on its staff. Not everyone can do that. Reporters, she said, want to be paid. She got upset and said, "If you do a good job, you should always be paid for it."

Bronstein: Bronstein does not deny that the editorial part of the paper is dependent on the business side, or the making of money. As to special interest groups, he "pays no attention to them."

Rosenhause: The necessity for financial strength at a newspaper is "self-evident," she said. She implied that a newspaper will die here too if it is not strong financially. (This editor had the least to say about social responsibility theory. She seemed to think they were an obvious part of the business and didn't require much comment.)

Munzell: Editors do care, he said, about the financial strength of the newspaper they are working for at the time. He sees the pressure daily at the Examiner, and knows the power of an advertiser or special interest group. Munzell sees the need for high standards, and not selling out. Munzell thinks newspapers have been doing a great job since 1776. "Is this a great democracy or what?," he said.

Dr. Black: Black said it was "essential" that a newspaper be financially sound. It gets back to the whole purpose of being a watchdog, he said. Black thinks that today the press is more responsible than it has ever been. "It's much more credible now," he said. He sees cycles that have run since the time of the Libertarian theory to the present age of social responsibility.

Dr. Barney: Dr. Barney sees the sixth tenet as being wholly related to advertising. Advertising allows the papers to do more good in society. Newspapers ought to be allowed to do this, Dr. Barney said. If making money doesn't work, maybe the government will have to step in, he said. Newspapers are socially responsible, Dr. Barney said. Is there a socially responsible system in Russia, he added.

Other comments about Social Responsibility from the participants--

Satterly: When asked how socially responsible his paper was on a scale from one to ten, Satterly cited the Dispatch's coverage of local news and said without hesitation that his paper was close to a ten in this area.

Feldman: (Chosen for an interview because the Dispatch could not provide a fourth person for discussion.)

Feldman sees journalism as a collaborative process, although her background is mostly in free-lancing. One starts with a story, she said, and it can lead to a larger story. Real-life stories can be found, but everything one does in journalism should be for the common good, she said. Journalism, she said, "gets in your blood," Feldman said that social responsibility is something that has to be built into the consciousness of everyone. Writing must be fair as

possible to keep a newspaper in a position of respect. Being unfair is a real problem, she said. But newspapers must be open to all kinds of influences.

Bronstein: Bronstein mentioned the new "civic journalism." He defined it as a more aggressive, community-oriented type of journalism that often involved the journalist getting deeper into a story.

Williams: Papers must be financially sound, insuring that it will exist in the future. Papers however need to make decisions based on what is right--not only financially sound positions.

Dr. Black: Black says we've come a long way since "all-knowing truth." He said the press has been working in a cold war environment and thinks that change is on the way. There are many press systems in the world, he said, but we don't have to get involved with them. We work under the First Amendment.

Dr. Barney: It's tough to be responsible, Dr. Barney said. But social responsibility is a good thing. But things in the news business are getting worse, he said. I don't think we're doing that good of a job these days, he said. There are economic pressures to print what is not socially responsible.

Most of the subjects the writer interviewed felt the need for some kind of sanctions or limitations on the communications industry. One thought social responsibility theory to be "over her head" and another said that "we don't use that stuff around here to make decisions."

Overall, the social responsibility theory has paved the way for today's introspections into the media and has been a valuable guide since libertarian theory times. It remains to be seen, given today's controversial news

environment, whether the concept of social responsibility can lead us into a new century or whether it will fall by the wayside.

All indications from this research indicate that the concepts are alive and well in the minds of today's practitioners and scholars.

Pattern Matching

Yin (1994) wrote that a viable way to verify and validate case study research was to take that research and use the technique called pattern matching. The writer has examined the research in this thesis and has come up with the following pattern matching conclusions.

Tenet No. 1.

Six out of ten participants, thought that the free flow of information was the basic value of newspapering. That's six of ten of respondees. The other four had various reasons for not agreeing with the tenet, although none of these participants ruled out information as the basis of news completely. Derry thought there was too much information going on. he wants more significant information.

Satterly felt that the best way of achieving tenet No. 1 was through the editorial page. Hafeldine thought it most important to get both sides of a story, and did not comment on information per se.

Bronstein wants his reporters to bring more of their own opinions to the flow of information. he was the leading proponent for interpretive reporting.

In all, the pattern that emerged on No. 1 was that information is a good thing and is basic to the business. Discussion and debate are also very helpful, according to majority opinion.

Tenet No.2.

Sixty per cent of the participants regard tenet No. 2 as a viable concept. Rosenhouse thought it a major role of newspapers. The other four had some rather vague answers. Munzell felt that re-enforcing the values of society was more important here. Dr. Black called enlightening the public a "pluralistic notion." Dr. Barney was much more philosophical and called "living one's life" as the key to any kind of enlightenment.:

Tenet No. 3.

Most of the participants believed that newspapers should serve as watchdogs against the power of the government. Eighty per cent believed it to be a good notion. Feldman sort of disagreed but said that one had to be fair when dealing with government. Dr. Barney called the safeguard notion "a bit vague." Barney said that there are newspapers who don't cover government, and they are still newspapers.

Tenet No. 4.

Only 20 per cent thought tenet 4, the bringing together of goods and services through the market, was a bad idea. The remaining eight had no problem with the idea of advertising.

Feldman said simply that no one was thinking about this tenet, but she acknowledged her paper takes in advertisers. Bronstein said a newspaper had no business in the advertising side of the market. He wants advertising out of the newsroom, and said however that advertising was an essential part of the publishing business.

Tenet No. 5.

Rosenhouse was the most positive about this controversial tenet. She likes entertainment and thinks it helps a paper. Only six out of ten agreed with her. The other 40 percent were less than enthusiastic when it comes to entertaining a readership. Derry had little to say about entertainment. His city editor, Satterly, also called entertainment "low priority." Hafeldine was indifferent when it came to entertainment. Williams, a top notch investigative reporter, was unenthusiastic when it came to entertainment, but thought listing theaters was a newspaper's "duty." Feldman, who was negative on some of the tenets and called them "above her head," saw no reason to "not lighten up you newspaper."

Tenet No. 6.

Only Hafeldine (10%) felt that a newspaper should not worry about being financially healthy. She said strongly that a "newspaper is not a business." The other ninety per cent of the subjects said that it indeed was necessary to have a financially strong paper. "Reporters must be paid," said Feldman. Dr. Barney warned that it may be necessary to involve the

government in the financial affairs of a newspaper if that is the only means of publishing.

CHAPTER V

Summary

Theory vs. Practice

One of the main research questions was, "Is the theory still valid and relevant with the day to day operations of the press." From the writer's research of the six tenets of Social Responsibility theory, one thing is clear. The tenets do matter to at least sixty per cent of those researched on every theory questioned raised.

Sixty per cent of tenet one respondees said that the tenet was valid and worthwhile. That is an unequivocal "yes" to the question of the free flow of information, debate, and discussion. The practice of informing readers is relatively strong, although one said there was "too much information flowing."

Will the Social Responsibility theory have an effect on the future of journalism? Only one of the subjects suggested that some agency such as the United States government might have to step in and so the job if newspapers don't remain responsible. Ninety per cent felt that newspapering was a business and each paper should remain healthy to counteract pressures from within and without.

Only sixty per cent thought that the use of entertainment throughout the pages of a newspaper was important. That's still a majority of those surveyed. A lack of interest in entertainment was perceived, but most thought it a good idea.

From the numbers, Social Responsibility theory is important to most journalists. They have heard about it or read about it and apply it to their daily thinking about journalism. Only 10 per cent called the idea "too lofty." There are probably others at newspapers who believe that the theory is not practicable, but this writer did not find any in his research. Eighty per cent believed that the paper should be a watchdog against government. This tenet is imbued in the daily practice of putting out a newspaper, and is just part of a guide to a philosophy about the press in this country. This is how a theory can help, another research question. The Commission on Freedom of the Press suggested that if the press does not remain responsible, then somebody else will have to oversee it. The Social Responsibility theory keeps journalists on track.

What would the press be like without a guide to social responsibility? This research question can be answered by looking at any nation that does not have a free press, a free flow of ideas and information. The soviet press, before the nation crumbled, is a good example. It was responsible to its society, one could say, but hardly free. As written above, only one subject, Dr. Barney, cautioned against any control other than what is evident in the free-enterprise system of publication. Eighty per cent, a somewhat surprising number in this writer's mind, thought that tenet four, the bringing together of buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising, was a good idea.

Only 10 per cent thought that the newspaper business was not a business, and this was a reporter with strong views about freedom of the press. These participants see the press as verification of what they do every day. Some want more changes, like the editor who wanted more interpretive journalism at his paper, or Dr. Barney, who said the press was too commercial. But the writer got the sense that most participants believed in what they were doing, that the job of newspeople was indeed a profession.

Only one time did the writer hear the phrase, "This tenet is no good for the media, that no one is thinking about it anyway, so why should one care."

Though they may not always cite the Social Responsibility theory in as many words, the writer is confident that the theory is on their minds and is put into practice.

Literature, Findings, and Practice

The Hutchins Commission report in 1947 was probably the most important piece of literature that we as journalists have as a guide today. Among other things, it stated that the press should report information in a clear, precise manner. Without the commission on the Press's report many an editor would not have a reference point as to how to go about their job.

Most of the subjects of the writer's research were well aware of the Hutchins report and its importance to journalism. They have had some journalistic training and have had years to hone this special relationship to the truth and freedom of the press.

The "circles of control" mentioned in the literature review are simply ways in which codes and ethical behavior develop. The subjects were not asked, but the writer is sure each would respond that he/she is an ethical person. The findings suggest a basic belief in freedom of the press and democracy as a way of life. Only one respondent suggested that the Soviet system might have been considered socially responsible also.

The writer likes to focus on Libertarian theory as the bedrock for all that is done in today's press. The founding fathers were a remarkable lot. But their freedom was one of freedom "from" and was essentially negative in its structure and response. What they gave us was a sense of freedom and hope and an insistence that one's voice be heard.

Journalists are a fairly democratic group, and any attempt to limit the freedom we now all share will be met with a harsh hand of protest. Although only one subject believed that newspapering was not a business, the literature supports the notion that money will be made from journalism. Even though polls rank journalists far down on the trustworthy scale, "most" can be said to hold an honest job and make an honest living.

Because most journalists belong to an association of press members, there is greater communication today amongst members of the press and this shows in the patterns of the research. What came out of the research is a common approach to their jobs and a common way of looking at the world of journalism. In other words, journalists tend to think alike.

Codes, like the Social Responsibility theory of the press, are not enough to ensure fairness and accuracy. It must be a part of the conscience of each

journalist. Journalists must be representative of society as a whole. The writer does not know how this situation will play itself out due to changes in affirmative action, but this recommendation by the Hutchins Commission must be adhered to in the future by some means.

One subject in a very powerful position suggested that the field needs more interpretive reporting, more opinion in each story. This may be the new trend in journalism, although it was tried once before. Most editors feel that getting the facts right is what their jobs are all about.

The major point to retain is that the press is indeed in a privileged position under the American government. If we wish to go on having that freedom, we better keep a close watch on ourselves.

There is also a duty for the public. That is, to stay informed, participate in one's community, and express oneself through the use of editorial pages and guest columns. Without the public's financial loyalty, but more importantly their commitment to the newspaper, journalists would soon be out of a job because the readership just wouldn't be there.

When a columnist gets himself into trouble by printing stolen material, or when the right of privacy is ignored, then these examples of press misdeeds must be stopped for the welfare of all in the field.

Final Thoughts

We have seen that over a process of time Social Responsibility theory has evolved from now outdated Libertarian theory. No longer is free

expression a God-given right for all to practice. It is a right that can be practiced if certain limitations or requirements are observed.

Most of the eight newsmen the writer talked to are aware in a vague way about the Social Responsibility theory and its ramifications. They know that they operate to some degree under its guidelines daily. Most however, when confronted with the six tenets of Social Responsibility theory, consider the theory to be somewhat abstract, not altogether necessary, and "above them" to a certain degree. This doesn't mean that they aren't aware that they are responsible for the "free flow of information," it just means that it is such an essential concept of the job that it seems to be regulated into the back door of their minds.

The two academics that were interviewed were much more responsive to the Social Responsibility theory, the Commission on Freedom of the Press, the Four Theories of the Press, etc. The two university scholars differed in their opinion as to the state of today's press, but found the six tenets of the theory to be a viable, necessary and interesting field of discussion. The answers they gave to questions were much more lively and to the point.

But all who were interviewed agreed that there should be some restrictions on publisher's and editor's--so that the product they produce does not infringe on the rights of the public and does not infringe upon their own right to publish as well. Some feared the government's intrusion into their business and also agreed on the need for some sort of self-control or self-limitation.

Most of those interviewed were not directly aware of the Commission on Freedom of the Press's effort at encouraging a livelier, more balanced, and responsible press. In fact, the respondents were somewhat insulted by the questions on the six tenet, saying in effect "this is what we do on a daily basis, this is what a newspaper is all about."

For the most part, newspapers today are pretty savvy when it comes to social responsibility. They are aware of the concerns of the public on balance, invasion of privacy, and sensationalism to mention just three areas. Yet editors go into these areas with more and more frequency. The editors claim that they are giving the people "what they want." They are creating a product that after all must sell. The writer is convinced that those with whom he spoke from the news media know when they are stepping "over the line", when they are going against the high standards of journalism the consumer should expect.

Being aware of your customer's needs is a must for editorial personnel. Helping the consumer out directly with a "Consumer Reports" "column" is one way of acknowledging social responsibility directly. Letters to the editors and guest columns are another means at finding out where the public stands on issues while at the same time providing a forum for the discussion of ideas.

Although it was not discussed at length, the newsmen interviewed seemed to be keenly aware of the pitfalls of libel, from the smallest paper to the largest. Each must rely heavily on each paper's legal department. One got the sense that the smaller paper interviewed would guard against libel to a greater extent. In this respect also, the smaller paper seemed to be more

susceptible to the pressures of advertisers, and their constant complaining about editorial content. Most had no problem per se with advertisers, knowing that is where their checks come from for the most part. It seems that the higher you interview in management the stronger the desire for good relations with the advertising department and the business office in general. It may just be a fact that as one's salary is increased to the level of executive, the more pro-business one becomes.

Most subjects interviewed did not see advertising as something "evil." One editor even suggested that advertising was almost akin to news, by the fact that it is read all the time. Most appreciated the money ads bring in to the newspaper's base of operations. But no one wanted to see advertising become part of the news operation, as the Los Angeles Times has moved recently. Advertising has no business in the newsroom, according to all that were interviewed.

The tenet about enlightenment concerned some of the editors and reporters. First, it assumes that the readership is dumb--that it needs enlightening. One editor, when confronted with this part of Social Responsibility theory, said that he "was a Buddhist," and so had no meaning for him. The problem seems to be that the word is a carry-over from Libertarian theory, where reference to God was frequent and the belief that God's truth would win out in the end. Most believed in self-government as an ideal, so the problem seems to lie with the word "enlighten". One editor said that enlightenment was "far above her."

Self-government is one thing, but self-sufficiency of the newspaper, making it financially strong, is another. Most editors/reporters were a bit uneasy when talking about the health of their newspapers. Most want to be strong enough to counteract advertisers and special interest groups, but they generally leave financial worries to the business departments of their various newspapers. The higher you go in the chain of command, the more one tends to worry about financial strength.

The inclusion of entertainment into their pages was met with a less than pure positive response. Most thought the listing of theaters was a service that should and could be provided, but most subjects were less than enthusiastic when it came to pure entertainment. The concept of entertainment news was warmly received, but pure entertainment in the form of reviews and comics, calendars, crosswords, etc., was low on their priority lists.

Papers should inform, the editors seemed to be saying. And that information should be fair and balanced. Most of the subjects knew they were in a socially responsible field and held a socially responsible position. But it was only the academics who could talk to you at length about the ramifications of the different aspects of Social Responsible theory. In other words, the subjects did not use the theory on a day to day basis, in their decision-making, but they still knew what the implications of the theory meant. None of the language in the theory was strange to the subjects. Some were looking into the future and talked about civic journalism."

So the interviews confirmed what the writer's hypothesis was. That is to say, social responsibility is "in the air" of most newsrooms and is a concept that moves the institutions forward in a positive way. The writer doubts that those interviewed could recite the six tenets of the Social Responsibility theory, but it is a concept that has gotten into their heads somewhere along their career paths.

Only one subject, a managing editor, had little to say about the concept. She was polite and responsive, but she didn't have a great deal to offer about Social Responsibility theory in general. This was somewhat surprising given the nature of the subject's position. The two reporters interviewed had a great deal to say about the theory and seemed less constrained about their answers. One reporter, when asked about advertising, said that there were "no core values" in the field. One reporter seemed to genuinely care about the community they served. This respondent truly found reporting to be a "duty" rather than just a profession.

Thus we come to the conflict of the two academics interviewed. One, the younger of the two, said that the news industry had never been more responsible than it is today. He taught newsmen to be very professional in the way they went about their business. He is an expert on the Commission's report, so he does have valid insights into SR theory, and, looking around, seems to think the business of news is in good shape.

The other academics interviewed, Dr. Barney of BYU, sees the industry as "getting worse." He even used the term "desperate" when talking about today's standards in the news business. (Both professors have worked together

and published several pieces on the state of mass communications today.) Dr. Barney was the only interviewee to warn against the state of today's press.

Dr. Barney is grateful for the First Amendment's guaranty of freedom of the press. But he said that having such an amendment to work with was like walking "around with an axe over your shoulder."

That axe, the First Amendment, may be, in the long run, the one thing that drives the engine of the press. Without it, the social responsibility of the press would not matter.

Summing Up

The writer liked Dr. Barney's summation of Enlightenment as "living your life". The purpose of this thesis was to establish the fact and confirm the hypothesis that the Social Responsibility theory of the press was indeed a valid and relevant guide to the practicing journalist as he/she tries to do their best in today's competitive market. It's not enough to live your life, as Dr. Barney said, but we all need help and the Social Responsibility theory provides that help.

Directions for Future Research

The writer believes, like respondent Dr. Barney, that there are still some things to work out in relation to press performance today. The concentration of ownership and the need for more money and success will blind journalists to their responsibilities. More research is needed in stopping this trend toward sensationalism and the stretching of fact. It may well be that we will need more control from without to solve the problems facing the press today.

Or it may take another theory altogether. Graduate study is a big step in the direction of responsibility. Knowledge and further research can help the press, if it will only listen.

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Appendix

Preliminary Questions for Managing Editors (subjects)

- 1) Have you ever heard of the Social Responsibility theory? If so, where.
- 2) What does the theory contain?
- 3) Is it being applied in your office on a daily basis? If so, how?
- 4) Are your employees aware of the theory or its implications? If so, how?
- 5) Do you think your staff reflects the values of SR theory and why?
- 6) Are you or your employees aware of recent controversial problems in the press? What?
- 7) When have you discussed press performance with your employees?
- 8) What did you stress in these conversations?
- 9) What types of issues do you stress at your newspaper?
- 10) Are minority issues featured?
- 11) What would happen to your newsroom if there were no concept of Social Responsibility?
- 12) Have recent cases of news irresponsibility affected your newsroom?
- 13) If you believe in a socially responsible press, what can you do to help that cause?
- 14) Can an editor have policy differences with his newspaper and implement his own views? If so, how?
- 15) Has new technology caused any problems in the Social Responsibility area? If so, what?

- 16) Does keeping the paper viable and alive interfere with Social Responsibility? How?
- 17) How does entertainment work into your scheme of what your paper should be?
- 18) Why was government singled out in the Theory?
- 19) Do advertisers ever play a role in your news decision making?
- 20) Would you agree that a newspaper has to be financially strong in order to avoid the interests of private, wealthy groups or individuals?
- 21) On a list of 1 to 10, how socially responsible is your paper in your view?

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