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# Gulf Coast journalists and Hurricane Katrina: mounting challenges to the work routine

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GULF COAST JOURNALISTS AND HURRICANE KATRINA:  
MOUNTING CHALLENGES TO THE WORK ROUTINE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in

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by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore through sourcing and framing the changes Gulf Coast journalists made in their news reporting as a result of directly experiencing Hurricane Katrina. Data for this study was obtained through the archives of The New Orleans Times-Picayune and through the Nexis/Lexis database. Many Gulf-Coast journalists lost their homes and were affected by the storm in various degrees with one case of a reported suicide attempt. The daily newspapers of the cities of New Orleans, La. and Biloxi, Miss., received Pulitzer Prizes for Public Service for ceaseless and tireless reporting of the disaster. This study attempted to measure any changes in media norms and routines observed through source-types and framing techniques by comparing one year before the storm with one year after the storm for both The Times-Picayune and The Biloxi Sun-Herald.

This study found that Gulf Coast journalists increasingly framed the news after Hurricane Katrina using a human interest approach, with longer complex thematic stories. These journalists increasingly used ordinary people who were unaffiliated to organizations as sources a year after the storm. Interviews with these journalists revealed that these findings were consistent with a new found connection and identification with the public because of the common suffering these journalists experienced along with the readers as a result of the storm.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

On August 9, 2006, a couple days shy of the anniversary of the devastating Hurricane Katrina, a member of the local news media in New Orleans made news himself. John McCusker, a photographer for *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, who aggressively covered the storm a year earlier, was arrested for attempting suicide during a police chase. In an article that graced the metro front of the newspaper, the report stated that McCusker had become depressed over his inability to repair his home after insurance agencies failed to process his claim (Times Picayune staff reports, 2006). McCusker best articulated his own downward spiral a few months before his attempted suicide when he shared with Adeline Goss during a National Public Radio program called “Voices of New Orleans,” that

...There’s some nights that just in despair you lay in bed, and like you’re a three-year old, you just lay there and say, I want to go home, I want to go home. And you can’t go home...But then one day, maybe you get a FEMA rejection letter, maybe you have a terse argument with the guy handling your SBA loan, maybe your insurance adjuster promised to meet you somewhere and he doesn’t show up, you know, and anything. And you’re right back to August 29.

It is well documented in newspaper reports and public speeches how the lives of Gulf Coast journalists, like McCusker’s, were dramatically altered by the storm. For instance, a 2005 *New York Times* article by Katherine Seelye, Bill Carter and Stuart Elliot painted Gulf Coast journalists across all media as “unflinching in their commitment to the deluged city – making plain the difference between the manufacturers of widgets and the gatherers of news,” despite the personal and professional obstacles they faced and continue to face (Seelye, Carter & Elliot, 2005). However, what is even more pertinent about McCusker’s story is how his own personal loss may have impacted his work. One

of the creeds of journalism, entrenched in the profession's newsgathering routines, is the semblance of objectivity or detachment (Mindich, 1998). As a result of the storm, McCusker did not shy away from voicing his opinion while addressing a group of Brown University students who were visiting the beleaguered city. Joe Strupp of *Editor & Publisher* quotes McCusker as saying, "Katrina didn't flood New Orleans – government failure did" (Strupp, 2006). Although McCusker's feelings of outrage were made public, perhaps behind the scenes, lurk scores more tales of how Gulf Coast journalists were dramatically changed by this disaster, not only in their personal lives, but professionally.

On a day to day basis, journalists operate within the confines of well established routines for gathering the news and shaping the news (Gans, 1979, Tuchman 1978, and Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991). However, disasters such as the September 11 terrorist attacks and natural disasters offer rare opportunities for journalists to adjust these norms to better cover a large-scale breaking news event, given the life and death needs of the public in receiving vetted, credible information. Hurricane Katrina, though, presented quite a different set of circumstances for local journalists. When it comes to natural disasters, Wittebols (2004) likens this type of coverage in the media to be much like a soap opera. The media swoops down on the affected area, gives great intimacy and detail into the lives of the victims, invest days and days in episodic coverage and offers real-time or "live" orientation in the heart of the tragedy. After the dramatization, all is well with the world, typically indicated when the media ceases to cover the story (Witteblos, 2004, p. 3, see also chap. 6). In the case of the September 11 attacks, although reporters in New York may have felt solidarity with the victims, or may have personally known a few victims, by and large, they did not lose their homes, loved ones or jobs on the same scale

as Gulf Coast journalists, nor do New York reporters have to persevere the ongoing circumstances for years to come like Gulf Coast journalists. In other words, there is no quick return to the norm for these local journalists as in other major news events, like the terrorist attacks or even wars, which would allow these correspondents to escape the tragedy. Gulf Coast journalists were exposed to disaster at home and at work.

As symbolically as McCusker, a newsworker himself, becoming the news, this study fundamentally seeks to measure the degree to which directly experiencing Katrina by these local journalists has impacted the way they frame and shape the news. We know that journalists are trained to source the news and frame it giving preference to authorities or those in a position of power (Entman, 1993b). Even when there are moments like crises, particularly during wars, journalists cover the news along the lines of the federal government or officials (Cohen, 1963). Although there are cases when journalists may challenge the official frame or interpretation of a news event, it is over-shadowed by wider-scale routine forms of coverage, or it may be short-lived, and journalists will eventually return to the norm (Tuchman, 1978).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

A case study of Hurricane Katrina allows for examination of a rare, non-routine event, which has had national and even international impact and whose effects are expected to last at least a decade. Hurricane Katrina therefore places the local journalist in a long-term non-routine situation for practicing journalism. This study therefore attempts to explore whether these journalists felt inclined to challenge the work routine as a result of their own loss and suffering, by plainly putting this question to them in interviews. Even more importantly, this study aims to measure whether these changes can



be measured through content analysis of local news coverage before and after the disaster for looking for changes in framing techniques and sourcing.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This mixed methodological case study can add to the many biographical works and qualitative studies on how journalists who have worked under prolonged disaster conditions, such as wars, cope with trauma. This study can also illuminate the tensions or limitations newswriters in crisis and disaster situations face when attempting to cover these events and at the same time wanting to make a difference or help. It also can help identify how journalistic norms and routines such as sourcing or framing can or should be adapted in crises, or how they may be failing journalists in crisis situations.

Theoretically, framing theory has outlined that news is framed in a top-down process from the most powerful or influential sources setting the debate or how a news topic should be interpreted in the media. This process is well entrenched in journalism's professional routines for shaping the news. This case study looks at journalists whose lives are strained by long-term circumstances, similar to the lives of those they cover each day. This attachment to their audience or community puts these journalists in a unique situation in terms of their commitment and investment to the issues at hand. These local journalists hold the keys to actually do something to shape the treatment of these issues in the forums for public debate such as the media. This study can illustrate new ways in which local journalists in the mainstream media may be attempting to fight back criticism about ineffectiveness or one-sidedness in day to day coverage in the past and how they are challenging the widely accepted norm that detachment strengthens accuracy and balance when it may be in fact weakening it.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Journalism as Routine**

Sociologists have often argued that journalism, considered by its practitioners as an autonomous trade, should be studied along the lines of any institution or business that carries its own rules and techniques designed to maximize its output (Gamson, 2004).

Beginning with the very output journalists produce, which is their news content, Tuchman (1973) for instance, questioned both television and print journalists in the same metropolitan market about how they classify their stories. These journalists stated responses such as hard news versus soft news, spot news and developing news and continuous news (Tuchman, 1973, p. 113-115). However when Tuchman (1973) asked these journalists to define these types of news, the researcher found that these journalists were unable to give a standard definition. They instead offered the researcher examples of stories they knew for sure fell into either of these categories. In other words, Tuchman (1973) discovered a newsroom culture in which a prototype is set for types of news, and journalists simply replicate it.

Several major research works have attempted to trace how these prototypes came into being. Some authors exploring the cost-benefit approach to news making have attributed the formation of these news types to demands placed on journalists to gather news within deadline constraints. Therefore journalists rely heavily on information subsidies from government agencies, corporations and organizations to structure basic daily stories (Boorstin, 1961). The metropolitan is considered to be the heart of the journalists work environment and all decisions about newsworthiness began there and stemmed outward historically (Kaniss, 1991). So low readership, for example, of

suburban editions takes place today because reporters are still organized along beats or specialties distinct to the metropolitan, such as city government, crime, courts, etc.

Growth and development stories in suburban editions are prevalent because journalists are viewing suburbs not as the community sees it, but in the way government or business sees it as in codes, ordinances and rival investment (Kaniss, 1991). So a strong interdependency exists between classifying news prototypes and maximizing daily news output (Tuchman, 1973). With each news type: soft, hard, spot, developing, continuing, Tuchman points out that journalists typify them into three categories: nonscheduled, as in soft news, unscheduled, as in hard, spot and developing news, and prescheduled, as in hard and continuing news (Tuchman, 1973, p 117). Journalists accordingly give priority to stories they can complete quickly, such as prescheduled stories and dedicate spare or remaining time to stories that require more time and work such as nonscheduled or unscheduled stories (Tuchman, 1973).

Furthermore, Tuchman finds that although journalists cannot universally define these news categories, they can recognize them by a set of values. One reporter in Tuchman's study indicates that hard news is often timely, requires urgency and more speed in producing than soft news. Tuchman and other sociologists have identified a list of what journalists call news values or the "essence of news" in determining stories. Journalists are taught to look for certain qualities in information such as conflict between groups, prominence of individuals, timeliness of the information, proximity of the event or issue to the media market, the novelty or oddity of the subject, and even with new technology and particularly television, the visual prospects of the subject (Gans, 1979, Gant and Dimmick, 2000, Graber, 1984, Tuchman, 1973/1978, Weaver and Wilhoit,

1996). These values are encouraged by management because they are considered to drive readership (Kaniss, 1991) or because it allows the media to serve its information providing role (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, pp 144-145).

How journalists decide stories based on news values or time constraints is only an entry point in how they shape the news. A set of institutional ideals also distinguish professional journalism from all other alternatives like blogging, or ethnic media. Mindich (1998) in his early 1900s historical analysis of objectivity in journalism argues that an emergence of science challenged journalists to quantify reports with facts, particularly when writing about health pandemics. Additionally, new media technologies, beginning with the telegraph, emphasized a hierarchy of facts, from the most important to the least. This, Mindich, argues, helped structure the inverted pyramid writing style from the most important details to the least important details. Journalists have since extended this to giving preference to quotes by prominent officials by placing them up top in a story because these officials are believed more credible simply because they have access to facts (Tuchman, 1978). Journalists in the modern era now sanction a professional mentality about the way they gather the news (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). They reflect this in the personal lives through disassociating themselves from groups or organizations that may taint a journalist's credibility, and sense of detachment or neutrality (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, pp. 125-177). Journalists also attempt to carry out this neutrality in their professional conduct by adopting fairness or balance in presenting the news by including viewpoints from sources on either side of a conflict, issue or debate (Gans, 1979).

These routines and professional ideals in news gathering influence how the news is shaped or framed because journalists have set boundaries about the kinds of stories they write about and the type of people who provide their information. This study aims to find out how a wide scale and enduring crisis as a result of Hurricane Katrina would affect these traditional concepts. Therefore, using an analysis of qualitative in-depth interviews, this study explored the following question:

RQ1: Based on interviews, in what ways did Gulf Coast journalists indicate changes in work routine?

But facts are not devoid of context though, and journalists often employ what is called the “angle” or “take” on an issue to focus the raw information (Koch, 1990, p. 18). News workers do not act alone in shaping the news. These norms and routines dictate to them what is acceptable and most efficient in meeting their daily demands to supply news content in a timely fashion. These norms also dictate to them how to build credibility among readers through fact-based, balanced coverage that centers on the abstract goal of objectivity. So while journalists see themselves as objective information providers, relying on facts, Koch’s argument above that facts do not stand alone, means they are applied to form frames that package the news, giving it form and meaning.

## **2.2 Framing the News**

This brings us to Entman (1989, 1993a), who attempted then and continues to work today to coalesce the emerging application of framing into relevance for mass media. Entman (1993b) pulled together the comprehensive deconstruction of journalistic professional norms and routines in works on news selection and interpretation by Graber (1988), Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) to cement that the news media does package

and organize the news content along particular guidelines. Entman's own studies and those of early researchers on framing (Edelman, 1993; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gamson 1992; Iyengar 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Riker, 1986; Snow & Benford, 1988; White, 1987 and Zaller, 1992) all indicate a pattern that describes how the media frame issues.

His much cited summary of how frames work says they “define problems,” “diagnose causes,” “make moral judgments,” and “suggest remedies” (Entman, 1993b). Gamson (1992) also agreed when he concluded that frames diagnose, evaluate and prescribe. Entman (1993b) outlines that these frames pass through four groups in the communication process. They are the communicator (journalists or officials), the text (newspapers, broadcast packages), the receiver (mass media audiences), and the culture (groups of people who claim allegiance to aspects of a frame, as well as the embedded public discourse of a frame) (Entman, 1993b, p 52-53).

Frame analysis was not always applied to the understanding of how mass media shapes the news. The theory has its roots in content analysis in the social sciences and mass media researchers have adopted it to understand how issues are portrayed and played out in the media. In its early application to mass media, the emerging definitions of framing helped solidify the purpose and use of frames. Bateson (1972) first considered the “frame” as a perceived reality shaped by messages that construct a created realm. The oft cited sociologist, Goffman (1974), offers that frames give audiences cues to “locate, perceive, identify and label” issues in social situations (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

In their analysis of media discourse of nuclear power and public opinion, sociologists Gamson and Modigliani (1989) mapped out how different interpretive

packages or “frames” of the nuclear power debate came into being and became central in defining how the topic was treated in public discourse. The researchers describe this frame as the “central organizing idea,” that makes sense of related events, hinting what is at stake. Furthermore, it organizes positions taken on both sides within the existing frame and associates symbols or phrases that serve as metaphors that become indicative of a frame (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 3).

Researchers have also found when the media frames an issue, it has a profound effect on how the public interprets it. Fiske and Taylor (1991) state that when information is framed, it means aspects of the topic are elevated so it stands out to receivers, making it more widely processed and recalled. Graber (1988) clarifies that the media, through its news selection process, facilitate the socializing of the public by perpetuating existing frames whereby users encode them in schemas of how to view both sides of an issue. They also used these schemas as guides to block or tune out other aspects of a debate not included in the dominant frame (Graber, 1988, p. 206-207).

There are exceptions, though, when journalists introduce new schema through investigative reports that provide alternative debates about an issue that are outside the established frames for debating it. Yet, the author found that it was difficult for audiences to interpret or grasp new debates because they have been socialized from childhood to see issues in the dominant frame, for instance political ideology as only being liberal versus conservative. Graber suggests that news about foreign countries and science are examples of challenges in penetrating schema because its dominant frames are not fully contested and fleshed out in the American culture, making it difficult for the public to mentally encode the new schema (Graber 1998, p. 208). So when new schema is introduced to

debate the issue in other terms, these new definitions of affirmative action are vastly misunderstood or considered lacking credibility.

Challenging traditional schema or dominant interpretation of issues is also described as being counter-hegemonic because they challenge how powerful groups in society define issues. For instance, a 2003 study of a counter-hegemonic attempt to challenge the White House frames for support of the war on terrorism by reputable journalists Seymour Hersh and Thomas Friedman. Using a “cascading model” to describe the flow of information, Entman (2003) attempted to map how these journalists were shifting discourse from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia. Entman (2003) described this as a frame challenge which eventually saw several leading senators of both parties, including Sen. Joseph Lieberman changing his discourse to Saudi contribution to terrorism following the journalists’ lead (p. 427). Well documented studies show that media follow the administration’s lead on foreign policy or fail to challenge censorship disguised under the “national security” cry (see for example Chomsky, 1997 and Cohen, 1963). Entman (2003, p. 428) points out that this case study confirms the argument of hegemony theorists that the media stayed within the boundaries of the debate of war, but that challenge frames such as Hersh and Friedman’s were counter-hegemonic because they came from the bottom up in terms of central power.

Entman (2003), Gamson (1998) and Graber (1988) all found that it is difficult to mount challenges to dominant framing be it because it is set by those who hold power, or because it is engrained in the social culture. Therefore, this study begins to explore how a natural disaster crisis could favor a successful introduction of new schema for interpreting traditional news topics. The study investigates any changes in how framing



takes place. It also aims to explore how local journalists may have expanded who is allowed to set dominant framing of issues after the disaster.

Whether looking at old, established schema, or the process of introducing new schema, the media is the driving force in creating public psyche. Graber states that while people have the ability to tune out the media and “tame the information tide,” they do develop schema off the media’s framing of a news event or issue. For instance, Kahneman and Tversky’s 1984 experiments illustrated that when the media align the consequences of a particular course of action along a more favorable outcome, then audiences will prefer that option (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984, p. 343). Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) found that survey respondents supported the rights of AIDS patients when framed under the debate of civil rights, and that the respondents also supported mandatory testing for those infected when framed under public health impacts (p. 52). These studies, as well as the aforementioned texts examining the news selection process, outline Entman’s assertion that the framing process is one of inclusion and exclusion (Entman, 1993b, p. 54).

Researchers have developed a myriad of ways to measure framing at all levels. Dahinden (2005) in a meta-analysis of a decade of framing research in mass communication states that most framing studies limit themselves to only identifying frames. Out of more than 1,000 studies conducted on framing since the theory was adopted for media research, Dahinden (2005) identified some 25 studies that have successfully identified or quantified frames. One such qualitative study was Gamson and Modigliani (1989). In studying the development of frames in nuclear discourse, the researchers are careful to map that these frames are sold as media packages by agencies

and officials, and are laden with specific interpretation about distinct aspects of debating the issue and implications of it. The researchers both identify that there is a struggle or contest involved as groups attempt to bring attention to their “package” in the public domain. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) also indicate that it is important to trace those frames among groups and power holders to identify their transfer and subsequent presentation in media texts.

Additionally, one quantitative study included in Dahinden’s meta-analysis is the widely replicated Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) study of how television and newspapers framed the 1997 European heads of state Amsterdam meeting on the strengthening of the European Union. The authors have championed the deductive approach to determining frames, which would be neutral of topic, and would imply journalistic structures that set up how issues are framed (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). More importantly, Semetko and Valkenburg derived their frames from the rich qualitative field work on journalism’s norms and routines which are also the foundation works for framing. They identified five common generic frames or models in which the media shapes the news. These include the conflict frame, economic consequences frame, human interest frame, morality frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. The researchers indicate that the wide-scale social and legislative decisions surrounding the merger of European economies meant that the media tended to posit varying viewpoints and government positions. Hence, the conflict and responsibility framing techniques were more frequently used in stories. They also used quantitative statistical tests to see how terms or phrases symbolic of each frame clustered together in developing scales to measure the frames (p. 99). They found that more serious news sources, particularly

newspapers, framed debates about the European Union in terms of conflict or attribution of responsibility and that tabloids and sensational television framed the news within a human interest frame. Therefore since hard news subjects are placed in a conflict frame and soft news subjects are placed in a human interest frame, this study posits the following hypotheses about changes in local news content as a result of Hurricane Katrina:

H<sub>a</sub>1: Semetko and Valkenburg's "conflict frame," or technique, will be the prevalent frame before and after the storm.

H<sub>a</sub>2: Semetko and Valkenburg's "human interest frame," or technique, will increase in prevalence the year after the storm.

The meta-analysis found that tools to measure framing are most sound when they are built upon prior studies. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) derived their attribution of responsibility frame on that of Iyengar's (1991) study on framing effects. Iyengar (1991) identified two large umbrellas in which news can be typified. Firstly, news can be episodic, or in other words, it is information about specific events or topics. Secondly, news can be thematic, or that a specific event is placed in the context and analysis of broader socio-economic or political phenomena to name a few (p. 14). Iyengar (1991) found that news that was more thematic left survey respondents with a feeling that someone was responsible or to blame in his study on how poverty is framed (p. 85). When it came to episodic news, Iyengar (1991) found that topics like crime and terrorism were most frequently reported on an event by event basis and focused on individuals such as a perpetrator or victim, quite similar to Semetko and Valkenburg's human interest frames (p. 27). Iyengar also found that episodic frames with violent topics like crime and

terrorism accounted for 74-percent of news coverage in the year of his network sample. In other words, he established a pattern that episodic stories are more prevalent than thematic stories generally in the media and tended to focus on the individual rather than officials or leaders in society. Therefore, since episodic framing looks at individual events, and thematic framing places those events in context, this study claims that:

H<sub>a3</sub>: Thematic stories will increase a year after the storm.

Dahinden (2005) states that framing studies are most promising when they pursue an inductive quantitative approach because it can draw from qualitative findings and can be measured quantitatively and generalized (pp. 3-5). Therefore the mixed methodological approach or employing the best strategies used by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), Iyengar (1991) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989) can help inform new studies on framing. One of the aims of this study is to contrast qualitative findings from local journalists who describe how they frame the news after the storm with the quantitative content analysis data that illustrates this. Therefore this study also explores the question:

RQ2: How does a content analysis of changes in source use and framing techniques support or refute the journalists' assertions?

The author also states that framing studies must go beyond merely identifying frames or assessing framing effects on audiences and should begin to explore how frames are built or set into news content. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) coined this "frame sponsorship" in which "framing contests" take place as different groups attempt battle out their take on an issue in the media. Journalists therefore turn to sources to set the

parameters of these frames. They also develop criteria for selection of sources as part of their norms and routines. Several researchers have found that elites or officials are found to dominate “frame sponsorship,” typically measured by the frequency of their quotes, comments and viewpoints over others (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 7; Gamson, 1992; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Snow & Bendford, 1988).

### **2.3. Journalists and Sources**

As framing theory spells out, sourcing is integral to the framing process because individuals use the media to disseminate their package of an argument or a debate. Others exert their power over the media to shape the parameters in which an issue or a topic should be debated in public discourse and in news articles. Several of the field study texts in framing theory underscore how journalists rely on sources to shape the news (Gans 1979, Graber, 1984, Koch, 1990, Tuchman, 1978, Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991, 1996). Although journalists ultimately select sources, institutional pressures and traditions dictate how journalists select sources (Berkowitz, 1987).

The most common finding is that journalists select sources based on how sources make themselves available to journalists and help the journalist to get his or her assignments completed under deadline constraints (Sigal, 1973). Gans, (1979) in his widely used study of news making decisions at two major networks and two major magazines, describes these as sources who bring efficiency to a journalist’s daily routine (p. 128). Gans points out that journalists are trained to recognize sources that bring efficiency to the work routine and journalists can spell out specific ways in which one source is helpful over another. Since these sources help journalists carry out routine news gathering practices, they are often referred to by researchers as routine news sources.

Gans breaks this down into six areas that spell out the types of sources journalists heavily rely on compared to others during the norm.

Firstly, a journalist looks at whether a source is suitable to a particular news item. Suitable sources are usually built up over time and journalists keep records to categorize sources used in the past that were efficient in providing information on certain topics. Secondly, journalists select sources they consider as being productive in terms of supplying lots of information that journalists would have to spend time and effort to obtain. Thirdly, Gans indicates that journalists chose sources they consider are reliable because their information requires little to no double-checking. Fourthly, journalists seek out trustworthy sources who they consider lack obvious motive or agenda for providing information. They also determine trustworthiness when the source has been right in the past. The fifth and most common selection criteria are sources that are authoritative. These are often sources that are officials or hold public office. Gans states that these sources are particularly important when journalists report hard news or controversial stories, so that journalists can protect themselves against attacks on their credibility. Finally, journalists look for sources that are articulate. Gans states that particularly for television, these are sources who can be concise, use proper Grammar, and even be dramatic about an issue or point (Gans, 1979, pp. 128-131). Therefore, during the norm, these routine sources who are considered reliable, credible, authoritative and trustworthy, tend to hold power (Reese, 1991). Journalists tilt favorably in relying on these sources because their position in society as officials and their spokespersons bolsters their claims and provides credibility to the information they are providing.

Given Gans definition, researchers therefore have classified sources that fit the above criteria. Berkowitz (1987) classified sources as being affiliated or unaffiliated with an agency or institution. Sources that were affiliated belonged to federal, state, local and foreign governments or all other agencies. Governmental sources used in stories are either elected officials themselves or their spokespersons. For all other agencies, such as corporate or non-governmental agencies, sources were either in executive positions or were spokespersons for the agencies. The sources were found to be most prevalent in day to day routine coverage in the media. Unaffiliated sources are not readily included in day to day routine coverage (Berkowitz, 1987).

Gans, (1979) as well as Tuchman (1978), in both their field studies of news rooms found that the practice of cultivating sources for routine work plays out in the dynamics of newsroom politics. Knowing more sources, particularly official ones, distinguish reporters in their seniority and influence editors in their story assignments (Gans, 1979, Tuchman, 1978). Therefore, reporters holding more powerful sources are assigned top stories or front page pieces. This internal pressure to advance offers an incentive for reporters to spend more time building up relationships with powerful sources or pandering to powerful sources in the hopes of a returned favor on major stories down the road (Breed, 1960). It creates a “press room culture” where journalists hoard sources with the hope of advancing over colleagues (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 68-81).

Based on these institutionalized criteria journalists also develop preconceived notions about certain types of sources over others. Tuchman (1978, p. 93) found that journalists believe individual sources usually have an axe to grind and require these sources to prove why a journalist must believe their claims. Journalists also prefer using

heads of organizations as opposed to lower ranking employees because they believe that an executive would be more accurate than a staffer. When looking at newspaper size, journalists working for major newspapers, with more years of experience, lean toward official sources offering information from major businesses and government. These journalists sidelined sources when information was supplied from schools, law enforcement, non-governmental and civic organizations (Powers and Fico, 1994, p. 93). When looking at specialties or news beats, political reporters tend to select liberal sources or conservative ones in accordance with their opinions (Lichter and Rothman, 1990). Overall, journalists avoid sources they believe would refute their ideas or facts in a story and look for sources who would confirm their assumptions about a trend or an event (Stocking and LaMarca, 1990). In many cases, the closer a reporter got to a source, the more researchers found the source's point of view influencing the reporter's treatment of a story (Soloski, 1989). Even in defining how issues in a diverse community are portrayed, Berkowitz and TerKeust (2005) argue that news workers feel constrained to paint a picture of the community that is in accordance with dominant social groups in the community (p. 133).

When the news routine is interrupted by local or national events, researchers found that journalists begin to diversify their sources. When breaking news occurs, journalists initially seek out the eye witness, oftentimes ordinary people, and rely heavily on them when in search for immediate information on the ground (Gans, 1979). In newsrooms during the norm, editors and producers have a strong influence over source selection. But during non-routine events or coverage, journalists turn to sources outside the traditional scope to help them develop new ideas or get a new take on an ongoing or



major event (Berkowitz and Beach, 1993). Stories that are thematic in nature tend to include sources that are not common used in routine news coverage. Kurpius (2002) found in a study of television stories using a civic journalism approach to reporting that some groups of minorities and women sources, often considered marginalized sources, were interviewed at higher rates than the Census proportion in the sampled areas. This contradicts the norm where journalists consider information from official sources to be more factual during the norm, but however consider eye witnesses to hold some measure of accuracy in the immediacy of a news event. Since sources that journalists marginalize in routine news tend to rise during non-routine news events, this study seeks to find a similar trend in Hurricane Katrina coverage.

H<sub>a</sub>4: Non-routine sources will increase in coverage after the storm.

### **2.3.1 Natural Disaster Events**

One consistent news event that alters the routine for journalists is natural disasters, which like wars and other conflicts, fall into the breaking news category for journalists. These disasters offer a different set of circumstances for journalists to operate in. Some can be forewarned, like hurricanes, so journalists can plan coverage, and others, like earthquakes, are less predictable. For this reason, studies on natural disasters take place as each disaster occurs and brings new unique situations with it. And because of the devastating impacts of natural disasters, they make for solid news events, particularly hurricanes that offer the media a larger window before a storm to prepare for extensive coverage efforts (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998; Perez-Lugo, 2004). The body of research on the subject, by journalism scholars, is therefore spread out and seldom continuous and focuses on the media's role in disseminating information to the relevant

audiences. Neither do these studies consistently explore how journalists must abandon these norms to adjust to the needs of audiences when covering disasters.

#### **2.4 Disasters and the Role of the Media**

The media assumes special functions during disasters and interacts with sources and audiences in different ways (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998). Over three studies on hurricanes, these researchers suggested that the media was vital not only to public officials as a medium to issue warnings and to alert the public to emergency services, but also in keeping residents updated and informed. Their studies focused on the role of the media in an awareness, persuasion and preparedness role as an authority for the public on how to prepare and respond to disaster situations.

Official sources make use the media as their communication means during disasters, but it is not the only reason that makes the media authoritative during these events. The media also gets this authority in disaster situations by exploring the kinds of news sources the media turns to in natural disasters (Salwen, 1995). In his study on Hurricane Andrew, Salwen not only explores media activity in the preparation stage of a disaster, but also in the aftermath stage. News workers sourcing routines changed during this hurricane because journalists increased non-routine sources. Those non-expert sources, often victims or relief workers, introduced another aspect of the role of the media in the aftermath stages of a disaster, which he describes as the “human interest angle of a disaster” (Salwen 1995, p. 835).

The media’s use of sources during different phases of a disaster can be mapped according to three functions. The first is considered a “management role” in the preparedness stage of a hurricane, where the media provides official emergency

information and weather updates (Perez-Lugo, 2004). The second is a “recovery” role, where the media assess damages and reports on the efforts to rebuild the affected area (Perez-Lugo 2004, p. 212). In these two phases, the media relies on official sources. However a third area, that serves to reinforce the media’s significance during a hurricane or natural disaster is that of the “impact phase,” which Perez-Lugo suggests is a phase of media activity that fosters another role: the function of the media as a “linkage” and a “social utility” mechanism (Perez-Lugo 2004, p. 212). Here, the author sees actual journalists acting as sources in their reassurance of their audiences. Perez-Lugo (2004) points out that the media unite the disconnected audiences by fostering a sense of community and solidarity during the disaster and provides comfort for those affected through offering solutions, means to vent public frustration and a support line as a storm passes. The media then become more than an information base for audiences during a hurricane but according to Perez-Lugo, also functions as a “coping mechanism,” holding communities together in a crisis through emotional support.

Therefore, there is a dependency on the media by those affected before, during and after a natural disaster for a variety of reasons. Massey (1995) points out, that during disasters, the public relies on the media to fulfill roles that are not expected of them during the norm. Several studies that have tested the nature of media use during a tragedy or crisis have found higher levels and frequency of media use by affected audiences in all types of media used. Those studies have also attempted to assess the credibility of news reports during crises or disasters and found that those most affected are more skeptical of news reports when journalists are perceived to be removed from the disaster (Himmelstein & Faithorn, 2002, p. 537). This suggests perhaps a need by local media to

have sharper more representative coverage during disasters given a more critical local audience compared to national media.

Hurricane Katrina attracted national media to the news event, adding a competing voice to the disaster roles already being played out by local media. While the impact that national media had on audiences during Katrina to place the disaster on a national agenda is a subject for another study, local media differ from national media because audiences are seeking out those local functions such as information management, recovery and response and community linkage. Therefore local journalists feel more obligated to break traditional routines to accommodate these needs. Studies on relationships of local media to its audiences can therefore fill the disaster research gaps and offer some insight into the already existing connections between the local media and its audience

#### **2.4.1 The Value of Local News**

Outside of the norms, natural disaster research indicates that local media's role in the community is elevated. This is in part an extension of how local media is perceived in the community. For instance, Kurpius (2000) found in a study on public journalism efforts by local television news operations that those projects are one way that local media goes beyond its daily routine to foster democracy in its local communities. Those projects helped promote community service images and market positions for local news media as a way of identifying the station with their immediate audiences, their issues and their concerns (Kurpius 2000, p. 342). They also challenged news workers to adjust their norms and routines to effectively carry out these projects. Bradshaw, Foust and Bernt (2005) found that another way local news media demonstrate their oneness with the community is through public appearances of its top local anchors. The study not only

found that 50.4-percent of top local anchors made these appearances, but a significant portion of them believed that such appearances helped bring prominence to a local issue or charitable cause (p. 176). Nicodemus (2004) also suggests that the local news media develops a “civic atmosphere in local societies” by asserting specific stances over time on issues that affect a particular community. Through this involvement, local media can get its audience on its side, united together behind a cause and can even mobilize its audiences to act (p. 163).

At the same time, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) suggest that local media is what viewers are most familiar with evident through its influence and measured in the time spent by local audiences absorbing local content. When local media portrayed certain districts as being crime-invested, readers and viewers who did not live there carried the same perception of the area. The researchers found this to be so even when residents living there and crime statistics showed less criminal activity than the perception created by local media reports. The numbers also support the concept of the loyal local audience. Prato (1998) noted in a March Gallup Poll for that year that local television is perceived as less bias, fairer and more impartial than national news. Prato (1998) quotes Marty Haag, senior vice president for news in Belo Corp, “the trust accrues to the anchor people... There is an immediate feeling that these are people who live in my area. They are seen almost as family.” This quote, stemming from the poll’s results on local news perceptions, sums up the kind of entrenched nature of local media in the community. Outside of the norms, natural disaster research indicates that local media’s role in the community is elevated.

The familiarity then, and sense of solidarity that local news media hold on its market in non-crisis or disaster times, is supported by prior research. Local media's targeted markets allow it to appeal to the individual more so than national media. Therefore, local media's norms and routines, framing and interpretation of its news content are geared toward satisfying both the informational and community-building needs of local audiences both in routine and non-routine news events. Whether those changes in work routines, evident in framing and sourcing, can be sustained on a long-term basis is still to be studied. Hurricane Katrina offers a unique case study to explore how local journalists may adjust and sustain changes to the work routine to meet the needs of a community reconstructing itself for years to come.

Therefore, when looking at how local media functions during natural disasters and in the norm, there is a trend toward non-routine sources more so than national media. These non-routine sources are relied on as local media attempt to connect with the community and provide an emotional link for affected citizens during the disaster. Therefore, local media is acting on the part of the public interest, in a compassionate role or with a human interest approach. This interweaving relationship between sourcing and framing that is entrenched in the journalist's norm and routines, and which changes during disasters, leads to the following hypothesis:

H<sub>a</sub>5: Non-routine sources will be higher in the human interest technique.

### **CHAPTER 3. METHODS**

As suggested by Dahinden (2005) the mixed methodological approach to exploring framing is considered the most effective. Schuck and de Vreese (2006) employed this strategy to study the coverage of European Union expansion in the context of risk and opportunity framing. The authors conducted a content analysis to gauge the coverage tone in terms of the above frames and conducted an experiment to measure how those frames affected respondents support for the Union's expansion. Similarly, the current study used a quantitative content analysis to measure changes in framing, sourcing, and journalists' norms and routines before and after the storm. Because of the aim to assess changes from the norm, it relied on Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Iyengar (1991) for the framing techniques journalists typically used during the norm. Since these two framing techniques have been easily and widely replicated in other studies, it is easy to gauge what frames are dominant during the norm.

To better gauge changes in norms and routines, this study also relied on qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with these Gulf Coast journalists. Like the field studies of Gans (1980) and Tuchman (1978), this study attempted to draw on journalists themselves to describe their routines after the storm. Dahinden (2005) also points out that going to journalists themselves, through surveys or interviews, allows the researcher to gauge frame building and frame sponsorship. One drawback to systematically gaining data from working journalists is their time constraints and low response rate (Dahinden, 2005). Researchers therefore stay away from sampling journalists or require grants to conduct long-term study in newsrooms (Kurpius, 2000). Therefore, the interviews conducted with local journalists for this broadcast project provides raw and valuable insight that is difficult to obtain when conducting field studies. In sum, the goal is to map

changes in news content, firstly by examining how journalists described changes in their work ethic in interviews and by contrasting those statements by measuring changes in framing techniques and sourcing. Therefore the study aims to look at changes in the frame building and frame setting processes.

### **3.1 Content Analysis**

#### **3.1.1 The Sample**

The New-Orleans Times-Picayune and the Biloxi-Sun-Herald were chosen primarily because they jointly received the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service, considered the highest collective honor a newsroom can receive. This honor for public service recognizes journalists who live up to a social responsibility of the press. Aside from the papers receiving the honor together and for coverage of the same event, they also help provide reliability in this study. One newspaper's experience of providing "public service," through its news content may not necessarily be another newspaper's experience of doing the same thing. Through public speeches and through interviews with these journalists for this study, staff and editors at both papers indicated shared experiences and changes to the work ethics of their newsrooms. Therefore contrasting these two papers can clarify whether that shared experience manifested itself in similar ways or differently. It can also help build consensus, in a study that is primarily a case study of a unique event affecting a limited range of papers, that major changes in the norm can alter, or fails to alter, newsroom norms and routines or journalistic principles.

Following the recommendations of the meta-analyses of Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) and Lacy et al. (2001) for selecting sample size for newspapers, this study will use stratified sampling for yielding constructed weeks for each six months of the year. The



authors argue that this method of randomly selecting a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and so on for the six months at a time, controls for systematic variation, where certain newspaper issues or months may contain heavier editions or subject matter. In the case of this study, a constructed week was randomly selected for the first half of 2004 (January to June) and one week for the second half of 2004 (July to December) for editions of both *The Times-Picayune* and *The Sun-Herald*. This provided the sample frame for sourcing and framing techniques manifested in news content before the storm (see Appendix A)

For after the storm, this study selected the year 2006. While an exact year after Hurricane Katrina precisely began at August 29, 2006, including the six month period from January to June 2006 is crucial for validity. Lacy and Riffe (1993) argue that research decisions to exclude articles or editions in sampling to avoid bias, in effect could mean risking statistical validity. In other words, the articles or editions selected will not be measuring the concept. There are two arguments in favor of selecting the first six months of 2006, although they fall within the first year of Katrina. Prior natural disaster studies indicate less than a six month period that local media return predominantly to its traditional norms and routines and where intense coverage of the recovery stage of a disaster falls off (Massey, 1995, Perez-Lugo, 2004, and Piotrowski and Armstrong, 1998). In the case of Katrina, it can be argued that after December 2005, coverage of Katrina fell off, except for the occasion of the anniversary week in August 2006. In this case, this study will control for any days in the constructed week of 2006 selected on the anniversary week of Katrina, to exclude intense coverage of the storm.

Secondly, excluding the first six months of 2006 means there would be no way to gauge, if not for a short-lived period, that there were early signs of changes in frame

sponsorship and framing techniques by these journalists. If there are no significant changes in the week constructed for the latter portion of 2006, it can be argued that over time these journalists reverted to old habits. However, if six months after the storm these counter-hegemonic examples were prevalent, then it would be valid to assess them.

The second level of sample selection was the articles. The study looked at four front pages stories for the A-section and metro section for each day in the 4 weeks, which average at about 5 stories on each cover front. In addition the study randomly picked 2 stories each inside these two sections for a total of 4 inside stories for every day. The purpose for doing so is that while the most important stories are placed on section fronts, the process is highly subjective. Other newsworthy or substantial stories may get relegated inside. One guideline for selection of inside stories in the A-section is that it must contain a Times-Picayune or Sun-Herald reporter byline and not wire copy. This yields a substantial sample size of N=672.

### **3.1.2 Measurement**

The unit of measurement will be the individual sentences for framing techniques and attribution of quotations for sources. Firstly, coders identified descriptive aspects of the stories sampled. This included the story length, noted by word count and the story date, which was noted by the year, day and part of the year in which the story was published. Thirdly, the story subject was categorized according to Nexis-Lexis and *Times-Picayune* search engine story descriptions and was grouped under eight distinct categories: crime/courts, health, local/city government, state legislature, environment, development/growth, education, civic and politics. These were therefore story categories put forth by the news organizations themselves. The final subject category coders

identified as “other,” which included stories that did not fit into the above eight dominant categories for front page and metro stories. They included stories about sports and entertainment mostly for *The Times-Picayune* and military and personality profiles in *The Sun-Herald*. Then stories were identified as either thematic or episodic according to Iyengar’s (1991) definition<sup>1</sup> and were coded (0) for episodic and (1) for thematic.

### Frames

Coders then identified Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) five frames by answering yes or no to the item questions designed for each framing technique (See Appendix B). The attribution of responsibility and human interest frames include five question items each, the conflict frame includes four, and the morality and economic consequences frames include three question items each. These question items combined define these five framing techniques as follows:

- 1) The conflict frame: stories are structured around a conflict between, groups or individuals. This frame questions whether winners or losers are referred to in the text or whether two sides of a story or more are being presented to the reader.
- 2) The human interest frame: stories emphasize the human or emotional dimension of a topic, issue or problem. This frame codes for personal vignettes in stories or visual information that evokes emotions in the reader.
- 3) The economic consequences frame: stories explore a topic, issue or problem in terms of its economic impact. The frame looks for specific references to costs of undergoing a course of action and consequences of that action.

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<sup>1</sup> Episodic news looks at specific events, or a case study of a specific event, such as a murder scene, the plight of a homeless man or a drug user. Thematic news ties the specific event to an abstract context, generalizes it and adds background details to it, example the backlog in the criminal justice system, government welfare expenditures. (Iyengar, 1991)

4) The morality frame: stories look at moral dilemmas or consider moral questions within a topic, issue or problem. This frame simply looks for overall moral messages in story or specific references to God or religion.

5) The responsibility frame: stories indicate someone is to blame, be it an individual, group or institution for an issue, problem or event. This frame asks whether the government has the ability to solve or alleviate these problems or issues. It also asks whether the story suggests urgent action is needed to fix the problem (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, pp. 95-96).

Semetko and Valkenburg do not claim that one frame exists alone in a story, but argue that these are the dominant “frames” found to routinely exist in news content. They also admit that strong similarities exist between the responsibility frame and conflict frame and that the conflict frame can exist in all the frames (p. 95.).

### Framing Scales

Semetko and Valkenburg’s five frames were measured through the items in each frame and were added together to create an index for each frame. Coders indicated no (0) and yes (1) if the question item under any of the five frames was answered through an entire read of the article. The question items combined under each frame gave a score for the strength of each frame in a story. This meant that the attribution of responsibility and human interest frames were at their strongest in a story when it scored a 5 out of 5 on the index. Similarly, the conflict frame was strongest at 4 out of 4 on the index and 3 out of 3 for both the morality and economic consequences frames. Cronbach alpha helped

determine how reliable these items were in each index. Therefore, the alpha values for each scale were .91 for the human interest frame, .84 for the conflict frame, .28 for the attribution of responsibility frame, .58 for the morality frame and .69 for the economic consequences frame.

This study focused on the prevalence of the human interest and conflict framing techniques because they were most likely to change after the storm based on prior studies using these generic frames. The alpha values for these two indices were acceptable. Alpha values for the economic consequences frame and the morality frame were moderately acceptable but the alpha value for the attribution of responsibility frame was particularly low. This is because Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) items were originally developed to study politically charged issues. Their 2000 study using these items looked at the framing of a European Union heads of government meeting. The questions, though generic in nature, were tailored to describe politics and not necessarily stories of wider subject nature. Therefore some of the questions in each frame were weak in reliability when applied to all news sampled in 2004 and 2006. Even Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) tossed questions out of the attribution of responsibility and conflict frames that were unreliable in each index. Since they were assessing all frames, strong alphas were needed for each frame. This study focused on the conflict and human interest frames which attained strong alpha values.

Additionally, the scales differed in reliability from each other based on inter-correlation, ranging from  $r = -.042$  ( $p \leq .000$ ) between the morality and economic consequences frames on the low end and at  $r = -.18$  ( $p \leq .000$ ) between the conflict and attribution of responsibility frames on the high end. This supported Semetko and

Valkenburg's (2000) claim that there is overlap between frames but that they are for the most part distinct.

### Sourcing

In addition to Semetko and Valkenburg's approaches, the articles were coded for sourcing. This code sheet used Berkowitz' (1987) study on sourcing for affiliated and unaffiliated sources and positions for sources in various organizations, institutions and agencies (See Appendix C). While researchers have found a myriad of ways to classify sources such as non-routine and routine sources, official and unofficial etc, Berkowitz' bases his classification on the field studies that under gird framing theory. Affiliated sources are identified with an organization when quoted or referenced in a story. Therefore a business chairman can be quoted as being the CEO of a company in a story related to his or her company. However that same chairman can be quoted as an unaffiliated source in another story where he or she is quoted as being an eyewitness to neighborhood vandalism or as a parent at a PTA meeting. At this level a source was coded as an affiliated U.S. citizen, unaffiliated U.S. citizen, as well as federal, local or state government affiliated, to name a few (see Appendix C).

Additionally, within Berkowitz' sourcing codes, sources are categorized according to type of agency and position. This helped distinguish between the orientation of an organization and the status of the source. It was important to know the type of agency and rank of the source because sourcing literature indicates that non-profits and community groups are considered by journalists to have an agenda and less credibility; they are perceived to have an emotional attachment to a subject matter. Thus journalists are weary of them. Government agencies, on the other hand, are considered to have the

facts and more accuracy. Journalists tend to trust and rely on them more to cover their tracks in case of an error when writing sensitive stories. Therefore sources were coded as belonging to governmental, corporate, non-profit, law-enforcement and educational institutions to name a few (see Appendix C also). Berkowitz' (1997) categories also lay out the hierarchy of sources and their affiliation when it comes to norms and routines. Therefore sources that were executives, owners or heads of state, local and federal government as well as their spokespersons and legal representatives are considered more credible and routinely used than employees, the average man on the street and eye-witnesses (see Appendix C also). Knowing who the sources were helped indicate any change in framing the news after the storm. These framing technique and coding sheets combined, provided findings for the hypotheses put forward in the study

### **3.1.3 Content Analysis Procedure**

The articles were retrieved using *The Times-Picayune*'s archive system and through Nexis-Lexis for the *Biloxi Sun-Herald*. Two coders were trained extensively to identify types of sources, story topics and thematic and episodic framing. During the pre-test period, the coders and the trainer discussed questions about concepts within both Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) index and the developed framing sponsorship and framing contest indexes in order to further refine the instruments. The pre-test included 10 percent of the sample (N=67), with intercoder reliability of 83-percent, using Holsti's formula that measures percentages. Further clarification of Semetko and Valkenburg's index took place to improve reliability to 92-percent.

## **3.2 Interviews**

### **3.2.1 The Sample**

The interviews for this study were videotaped as part of an accompanying broadcast project as previously mentioned. The interview process took place during September and October 2006 and ranged from 10 to 45 minutes long. This project attempted to chronicle the experiences of Gulf Coast journalists in print, television, radio and online media from news outlets in the New Orleans metropolitan area and from Biloxi, Mississippi. The project also included the experiences and perspectives of columnists, editors, photographers, newsroom managers and producers. Since the content analysis focuses on changes in print coverage, it is important to note that the majority of journalists were print reporters from both *The Times-Picayune* and *The Sun-Herald*.

Over the course of producing the project, some 28 journalists were interviewed, but were not all included in the project. They ranged from journalists who covered city government, crime, the courts, the suburbs, education, health and abstract beats such as poverty, the environment and growth and development. The sample included a proportional mix of journalists who had lost everything during the storm, to others whose homes were intact, but were affected in other ways, or their relatives lost all their possessions. The project included a mix of journalists who stayed behind to cover the storm and those who worked the entire crisis out of temporary newsrooms elsewhere. There were a mix of reporters who worked on the prize winning projects and those who did not. There were also reporters who were long time residents of the city and those who had recently moved there to work at the newspapers. These interviews took place at the workplaces of these journalists, during the 2006 Associated Press Managing Editors



Conference in New Orleans, at their homes and after other speaking engagements conducted by these journalists.

### **3.2.2 Measurement**

Research Question #1 in this study attempted to describe the ways in which Gulf Coast journalists have adjusted their norms and routines based on these interviews. Therefore journalists were asked to specifically recount how they gathered the news before the storm, during the storm and now after the storm. They were asked to specify the technologies they relied, their relationships with the primary sources on their beats, the story angles they frequently used and the degree to which they wrote enterprise or harder news pieces. They were also asked to describe how they developed story ideas and where the story ideas came from (see Appendix D).

They were also asked to identify their opinions on journalistic ideals. These specific ideals included objectivity, balance, fairness and detachment. They were asked to indicate how they viewed these ideals entering the profession and how they view it now since the storm. They were asked to indicate through their work how they try to practice these ideals and they were asked to suggest any challenges to practicing these ideals since the storm (see Appendix D also).

### **3.2.3 Interview Procedure**

After the interview videotapes were transcribed, the journalists' responses were summarized and organized into common threads. The researcher found clear patterns in all the interviews concerning newsgathering techniques, journalism ideals, and specific concepts identified as having changed since the storm and others left unchanged.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

#### 4.1.1 Sample Descriptives

The main purpose of the quantitative content analysis was to measure changes in framing techniques and sourcing by year in the *Times Picayune* and the *Biloxi Sun-Herald*. However, individual articles were also coded for general descriptive data such as story subject and story length. In 2004, stories about “cops/courts” accounted for the majority of story subjects in the sample at 32-percent, followed by stories that fell in the “other” category at about 18-percent and stories about “local/city government” at 10-percent. In 2004, stories in the “other” category were mostly recreation and entertainment type features for the *Times Picayune* and military stories for the *Sun-Herald* in the same year. In 2006, stories in the “other” subject category were most prevalent at 27.5-percent, followed by “cops/courts” which declined to 21.3-percent. Local government stories came in third among subjects in 2006 and increased to 18.7% from 2004. Unrelated stories about Hurricane Katrina comprised the bulk of stories in the “other” category for both papers in 2006.

Story lengths increased overall in 2006 with a mean score for word count at 599.23 (SD = 447.511) up from 520.76 (SD = 361.906) in 2004. With longer stories in 2006 came increased sourcing from a mean score of 2.99 (SD = 1.835) in 2004 to 4.09 (SD = 2.293) in 2006.

In terms of framing techniques, thematic stories increased in word length in 2006. When controlled for Iyengar’s framing technique, the mean score for word count of thematic stories in 2004, 751.22 (SD = 484.964) was higher in 2006 (M = 901.60; SD = 604.069). Additionally, when looking at Semetko and Valkenburg’s frames, the human

interest frame contained the highest percentage in which all of its items were present in an individual story. In 2004, 22.6-percent of the sample contained stories in which 5 out of the 5 items in the human interest frame were present. In 2006, that increased to 36.9-percent. This is compared to the second most prevalent frame, the conflict frame, in which 9.2-percent of all of its 4 items in its scale were present in a single article, which decreased to 4.5-percent in 2006. The conflict frame however did experience an increase in the range of 3 out of 4 items present in a story from 13.4-percent in 2004 to 20.1-percent in 2006.

#### **4.1.2 Hypothesis Testing**

##### **Changes after the Storm in News Content**

#### **4.1.2.1 H<sub>a</sub>1: Semetko and Valkenburg's "Conflict Frame," or Technique, Will Be the Prevalent Frame before and after the Storm.**

Hypothesis 1 stated that the conflict frame will be most prevalent among all frames in 2004 and 2006. Overall, the conflict frame came in second most prevalent frame in newspaper in 2004 and remained in that standing in 2006 (see Table 1). The mean score for the conflict frame in 2006 ( $\underline{M} = 1.04$   $\underline{SD} = 1.387$ ) increased from 2004 ( $\underline{M} = .97$ ;  $\underline{SD} = 1.425$ ). However, when the conflict frame was compared to all other frames in 2004 an ANOVA indicated that it was not significantly more prevalent at  $F_{(669)} = .001, p \geq .05$ . Tukey's post hoc tests showed no significance in 2004 at  $p = .974$  compared to other frames. The conflict frame was also not significantly more prevalent compared to other frames in 2006 as well. An ANOVA of frame use in 2006 showed the conflict frame at  $F_{(722)} = .365, p \geq .05$ . Additionally, Tukey's post hoc tests found weak significance for the conflict frame's prevalence at  $p = .546$ . Therefore, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

Table 1  
**Frame Scales Mean Difference by Year, 2006 Significance**

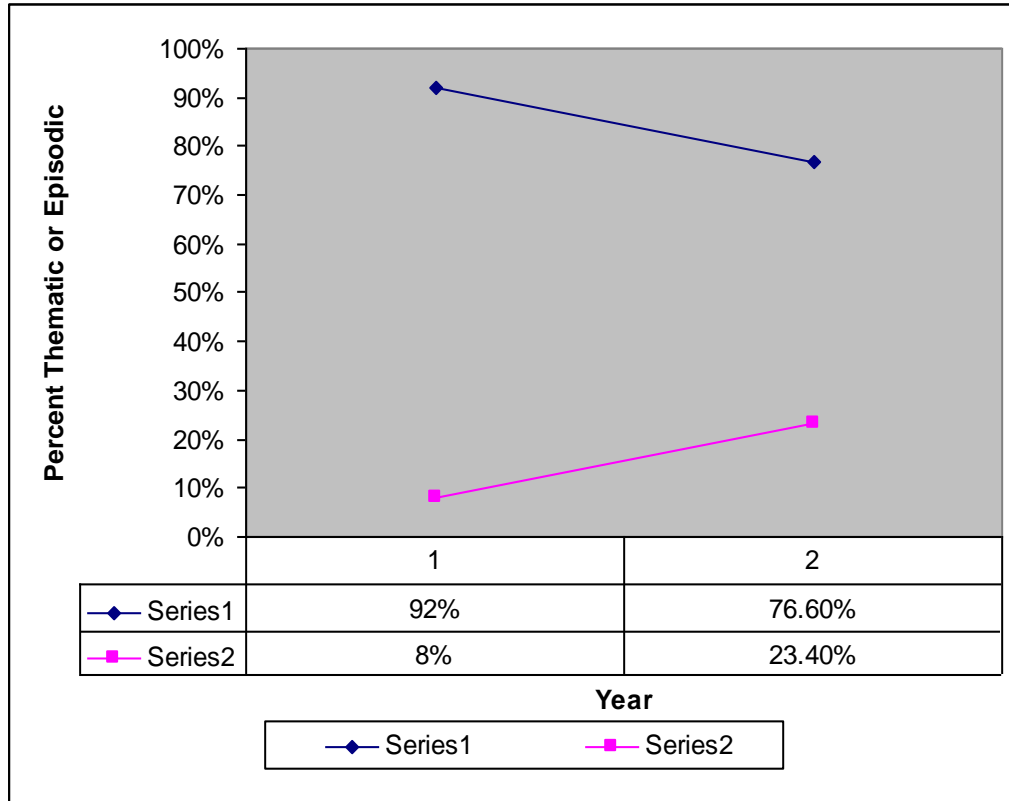
<i>Frame</i>	<i>2004</i>		<i>2006</i>		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Human Interest frame	1.90	1.990	2.34	2.181	7.196	.007
Conflict frame	.97	1.425	1.04	1.387	.365	.546
Attribution of Responsibility frame	.57	.809	.23	.499	43.698	.000
Economic Consequences frame	.51	.899	.54	.894	.274	.601
Morality frame	.09	.379	.09	.679	.009	.924

**4.1.2.2 H<sub>a2</sub>: Semetko and Valkenburg’s “Human Interest Frame,” or Technique, Will Increase in Prevalence the Year after the Storm.**

Hypothesis 2 predicted an increase in the human interest frame in 2006. Both descriptive, and inferential results, supported this claim. There was an increase in the mean score of the human interest frame going from 2004 to 2006 (see Table 1). Using an Independent’s Sample T-test, this difference in mean score for the human interest frame achieved significance at  $p = .007$ . This significance of  $t_{(665)} = -2.683, p \leq .05$  supported the claim that this frame increased in 2006.

**4.1.2.3 H<sub>a3</sub>: Thematic Stories Will Increase a Year after the Storm.**

In keeping with framing technique results, Hypothesis 3 predicted an increase in thematic stories after the storm. This too was supported by both descriptive and inferential findings. While episodic news frames were most prevalent before and after the storm, thematic frames increased in 2006 from 8-percent to 23.4-percent (see Figure 1). An Independent-Samples T-test for the mean differences in thematic frame use for each year was also highly significant,  $t_{(670)} = -5.604, p \leq .001$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.



**Figure 1. Thematic and Episodic News by Year**

**Legend**

**Series 1: Episodic**

**Series 2: Thematic**

**Year 1: 2004**

**Year 2: 2006**

**4.1.2.4 H<sub>3</sub>4: Non-routine Sources Will Increase in Coverage after the Storm.**

When looking at sourcing, non-routine sources, when analyzed by source affiliation, agency and status categories increased in most cases after the storm. Source affiliations that fell under the non-routine designation included “unaffiliated U.S. citizen,” “foreign citizen,” and the “other” option (see Table 2). The unaffiliated citizen attained a higher mean score in 2006 ( $\underline{M} = 2.45$ ;  $\underline{SD} = .142$ ) than in 2004 ( $\underline{M} = 2.05$ ;  $\underline{SD} = .118$ ) and was significant at  $p = .044$ . A significant increase in the unaffiliated citizen,  $t_{(196)} = -2.024, p \leq .05$ , supports an increase in non-routine sources. Additionally, the

agency types which were considered non-routine included “non-governmental/non-profit,” “educational,” “civic,” “other” and “none,” as in belonging to no agency at all (see Table 2 also). Sources belonging to agencies that were in the “none” category, meaning they did not belong to any agency, increased at a mean difference of .50 and also significant at  $t_{(198)} = -2.546, p \leq .05$ . The source status categories that were non-routine included “worker/employee/member,” “position not specified,” “victim,” “eyewitness,” “common-man/man on the street,” and “other” (see Table 2 also). Here the “common man/man on the street category had the most noteworthy increase from ( $\underline{M} = 1.91$ ;  $\underline{SD} = .127$ ) in 2004 to ( $\underline{M} = 2.40$ ;  $\underline{SD} = .152$ ). This mean increase in the common man as a source was significant at the .05 level,  $t_{(169)} = -2.237, p \leq .05$ . Therefore, sources that were unaffiliated U.S. citizens, who belonged to no agency and who were classified as the common man increased significantly in 2006. These three form the leading descriptions of non-routine sources and so these findings support hypothesis 4.

Table 2  
**Non-routine Source Mean Increase by Year and Significance**

	2004		2006		T	P
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
<u>Source</u>						
<b>Source affiliation</b>						
Unaffiliated U.S. citizen	2.05	.118	2.45	.142	-2.024	.044
Foreign citizen	1.00	.000	3.33	2.082	-1.504	.230
Other	1.00	-	1.00	-	-	-
<b>Source Agency/Institution</b>						
Non-governmental/non-profit	1.60	.109	1.65	.113	-.287	.775
Educational	2.11	1.430	2.26	1.375	-.479	.633
Civic	1.39	.143	1.62	.169	-.897	.374
Other	2.05	.247	1.42	.090	2.920	.004
None	2.00	.115	2.50	.153	-2.546	.012

(table continued)

Source Status/Rank						
Position not specified	2.50	1.500	2.40	.678	.072	.945
Worker/Employee/Member	1.61	.959	1.78	1.130	.076	.403
Victim	2.00	.548	1.75	.526	.314	.760
Eye-Witness	1.45	.143	1.56	.232	.385	.702
Common man/Man on the street	1.91	.127	2.40	.152	-2.237	.027
Other	2.07	.339	2.08	.400	-.011	.992

#### 4.1.2.5 H<sub>a</sub>5: Non-routine Sources Will Be Higher in the Human Interest Technique.

Hypothesis 5 aimed to measure the relationship between non-routines sources and the human interest frame technique. Non-routine sources were almost identically highest in the human interest and conflict frames (see Table 3). However a chi square test for association showed positive relationships between the human interest technique and non-routine source categories. Based on the findings of hypothesis 4, the three most significant non-routines sources were unaffiliated citizens, persons belonging to no agency and persons identified as the common man. Using Kendall's tau c, the unaffiliated citizen held a significantly strong association to the human interest framing technique,  $\chi^2_{(35)} = .142$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Persons belonging to no agency had a positive association with the human interest technique with significance at  $\chi^2_{(35)} = .137$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Finally, persons who were identified as the common man were significantly associated with stories using the human interest frame at  $\chi^2_{(35)} = .147$ ,  $p \leq .05$ . Although the human interest technique was not the only frame to carry the highest number of non-routine sources, its relationship to non-routine sources was highly significant. This supports hypothesis 5.

Table 3

**Prevalence of Non-routine News Source in Most Prevalent Frames**

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Human Interest Frame</i>	<i>Conflict frame</i>
<b>Source affiliation</b>		
Unaffiliated U.S. citizen	28.9%	28.9%
Foreign citizen	.7%	.7%
Other	.4%	.4%
<b>Source Agency/Institution</b>		
Non-governmental/non-profit	17.7%	17.8%
Educational	12.3%	12.3%
Civic	7.6%	7.6%
Other	15.9%	15.9%
None	29.2%	29.2%
<b>Source Status/Rank</b>		
Worker/Employee/Member	58.6%	59.1%
Victim	1.9%	1.9%
Eye-Witness	5.8%	5.8%
Common man/Man on the street	25.0%	25.0%
Other	3.8%	3.9%

**4.2 Qualitative Results**Changes after the Storm for Newswriters**4.2.1 RQ1: Based on Interviews, in What Ways Did Gulf Coast Journalists Indicate Changes in Work Routine?**

Research question 1 explored the changes to the work routine in the very own words of Gulf Coast journalists themselves. Through in-depth interviews, they indicated changes that can be divided according to work routines and views on professional ideals.

**4.2.1.1 Routines**Daily Assignments

As outlined in earlier studies exploring the average day of a journalist, these workers are able to pre-plan each day based on an expectation of upcoming press conferences, legislative debates, and even cops reporters, who must work their day



around breaking news, can count on a steady stream of press releases from law enforcement on the latest crime. The journalists interviewed indicated that this was their norm before the storm. They all indicated that in the immediate months after the storm, even in the first few months of 2006, they could not count on a steady and predictable stream of events for the day's news. One city government reporter stated:

“Normally you cover government, you cover today's event, we're going to start a new clean up initiative, tax initiative or the event kind of happened, a natural cycle, this is more like just finding out what is left, how much of the city is still left ... We are reacting to the stories, every day is pretty much an adventure.”

The journalists interviewed indicated that they now interweave all stories into a Katrina fabric-work. This can range from sports, to crime, to politics, to community news. Regardless of a news reporter's beat or specialty, stories are now placed in the context of Katrina. “It's to report whether things are moving or happening. That's what we've been doing, progress reports, or rather lack of progress reports,” according to another reporter.

### Converged News Beats

Since Katrina has linked stories together, these journalists have indicated that separation according to distinctions among news beats is less marked. The accompanying prestige that comes with working on beats like politics now is as equal as the education, health or suburban beats. Since all these aspects of the cities' metropolitan areas have been equally affected, the work of the journalists on each of these beats is equally revered. The journalists indicate that they share triple bylines with the education, growth and city government reporters on a regular basis, for instance. Competition within newsrooms has been highlighted by Gans (1979) as a newsroom culture; these journalists

indicate that working together is necessary to be effective. One journalist indicated that this stemmed from how the reporters worked in teams during the crisis:

“There was one police reporter with us and photographer...there was an art critic, there was a music critic, a sports editor, there were two editorial page editors and we were just thrown into disaster coverage. So it doesn't matter what your job is on a daily basis when you're in that situation, you just have to pitch in and get things set up, and get an organized newsgathering effort going, which is what we all did and none of us were in our regular jobs.”

### Gathering the News/Sourcing

One technique journalists use to shape story angles is by strategically selecting and placing direct quotes of others or paraphrasing quotes. It is how they maintain a distance but still get their point across. These journalists stated that since the storm, they feel less pressured into finding a source to state the obvious. They will include information as observations more often than they did before when they are unable to find a source. One reporter stated this about interviewing sources:

“I don't know if I ask any more pointed questions, or if I am any more aggressive, I think there is just an attachment, we all are experts on this in a sense, we all went through it and we go through it everyday.”

Journalists are also skeptical of reporting controversial news too quickly for fear of being inaccurate or putting their credibility in jeopardy. These journalists believe that any new information is pertinent for their beleaguered readers and that their loyalty rests with the needs of readers first. One reporter in New Orleans during the storm continues to defend some of the early reports and what he believed he saw:

“We and everybody sort of overreported the mayhem and then we did a story that debunked it. I still wonder though that there was more mayhem. The debunking that we did was very well sourced unlike the initial stuff we did, but I'm not totally convinced that some stuff didn't totally happen... it still kind of keeps me up at night sometimes.”

## Blogging

Print journalists are often weary of new media. They see the Internet more so as a way to hastily put news out that distracts them from skillfully crafting news stories. They are also aware that the Internet is crucial to future revenues. Every one of the journalists interviewed indicated that they have completely changed their attitudes toward the use of the Internet in their daily routines. However, what is unique about their views is that they embrace community journalism and welcome it to their newspaper's website. More importantly, during the storm, these journalists blogged, many times in the first person, about the details and reports they were receiving in the earliest stages of the aftermath. That constant interchanging continues today. Some reporters, who are not columnists, even write articles that appear in print about how they and their families are navigating the Katrina aftermath experience a year later. One reporter recounts his experience with blogging:

“I agree that the writing style became very personal and pointed, as has happened because that's just the way it was. It was so chaotic and there were so many citizens out there trying to find people and get help and I think the blog very much captured the mood of the people during those times. I do think our readers knew we were in a frenzied chaotic state, and the blog was almost a free for all for news, all sorts of things just got on the blog, because we found out about them. I don't know that we did stuff we couldn't check out, we tried to check out stuff as best as we could, but we had stuff get out there that turned out to be not quite right, or not true, that's the nature of the beast.”

### **4.2.1.2 Ideals**

#### Fairness, Balance and Objectivity

While these journalists are quite clear about how their work days have changed, they hold new contradictions about the ideals of their profession. Although they agreed that these ideals should not be abandoned, they offered varying definitions of these

ideals, particularly as it applied to their present circumstances. The following series of quotations speak volumes for the back and forth these journalists are currently experiencing about the aims of their profession.

“I think we have gotten a little more direct...and I think its fine.”

Another reporter attempted to clarify:

“I still think you still have to be fair and balanced. There’s no reason you have to be boring or detached. You still have to go find out the truth. ...one of the reasons we’re boring is because we strive so hard for that objectivity that is not necessarily in service of anything or the truth. It’s sort of this on the one hand this on the other hand that and who the hell knows. I think part of our job is to go root out all of this stuff and say ok this guy screwed up, you know, and I’m going to say he screwed up, ‘cause I’ve interviewed everybody, and he screwed up.”

A third reporter attempted to make sense of the contradictions in light of the circumstances:

“A newspaper’s credibility is all that we have, and I think if you do it smartly, you allow your columnist, your people writing commentary, the editorial page, to be the ones to use these more forceful laden type words. In the news stories, I think we have tried very hard to be fair and objective and while we’re sympathetic to New Orleans, we want to get the facts out there. We don’t want to look like the newspaper that’s turning a blind eye to imperfections of our own local government or our own local effort to rebuild after the storm. You have to be fair. People will see right through it if you just write about yourselves.”

And yet another disagreed:

“I think that objectivity is all very relative. Because right now, in this place and in this time, New Orleans needs the ‘we’ to be ‘we,’ the ‘us’ to be ‘us.’ Not in a sense that now, you’re going to take sides in these matters, but we’re all deeply invested and the community needs to hear that authoritative voice that it’s us.”

### Detachment

The wrestling of concepts, evident in the quotations above, begs the question of whether these journalists believed they could maintain the distance the profession requires them to have. Within the newsroom, reporters indicated that as time goes on, it is becoming harder to separate themselves from the reality:

“During the immediate days, I think people had an adrenalin rush, people had their blinders on, here’s the story, everywhere you turned, you couldn’t really be into this, you were right here, focused on this story. As time has gone on, we’ve seen people crumble emotionally, some people have had break downs, some people had to medicate themselves or turn to the bottle, short of some drug addicts.”

Another reporter explained how he and his colleagues view each story about the aftermath:

“It’s a personal story. I mean professionally it’s a story although it’s a million different stories. But everything is related to Katrina. But its more than a story to us, we take it a lot more personally”

Another reporter agreed:

“... [Katrina] changed the tone of what we wrote about because we knew intimately what we were talking about... We didn’t have to force ourselves to be authoritative. It came naturally because it was our collective life that we led. And that has continued to this day.”

In terms of looking ahead, one reporter offered this perspective:

“I don’t think it’s ever to a point where we separate ourselves and say we’re going back to a certain form of journalism, because I think the best form of journalism and this is me saying, is that kind of journalism anyway. That you’re invested and this is a sense of us.”

### Advocacy journalism

For this study, the executive editor of *The Times Picayune*, Jim Amos, best described how Katrina has forced the paper to do the unconventional.

“Well I think a newspaper’s news report always has to be fair and accurate and that you can’t advocate in the news columns no matter how passionately you feel about something. The place for advocacy is on the opinion pages of the newspapers. And on one occasion this past fall, we took that advocacy in the form of an editorial, and placed it on Page 1, which is normally the place of the news report. We felt so strongly about what needed to be said, at that point, mainly that the federal government owed it to New Orleans and to this region, to come to our aid in a way that they hadn’t yet. And that that needed to be said as forcefully as we could possibly say it mainly on Page 1. And so some people in journalism may think of that as a blurring of the line, I think it’s very clear to readers where we draw the line. I don’t apologize for that.”

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Discussion**

When brought together, both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies can help explain each other's findings. Indeed, answers to the results for framing techniques and sourcing changes can be traced to specific changes Gulf Coast journalists indicated that they made. In reverse, the contradictions within the responses of these journalists in the interviews are evident in the findings of the content analysis. Therefore, on the onset of this discussion, these results answer the overarching question of this study, which aims to establish a link between directly experiencing Katrina and changes in news content.

Story subject and length changed in 2006. Crime and courts stories dominated in 2004. New Orleans held the prestigious title of "Murder Capital" of the nation before the storm. Therefore, it is no surprise that crime and court stories were prevalent in 2004. Likewise, Biloxi is home to a military Seabees outpost, so military stories would be high in 2004. However, Hurricane Katrina reversed that trend positioning the "other" category at the top of the story subject category in 2006. Writing about Hurricane Katrina, with its complexities, meant that reporters resorted to more details and editors obliged them. So story length naturally increased overall in 2006 and that was most evident with thematic stories. More inches for stories allowed reporters to include more sources, which increased measurably in 2006. This signaled a clear change in what is determined news on a daily basis in the newsroom. In other words, it is fair to state that the news net was widened as a result of Katrina as the norm became to include stories that were not typical of news beats in 2006. An increase in story length also suggested that stories outside the typical news net are given equal priority as stories produced on news beats and even

more so when it came to thematic stories. The real changes that matter in assessing effective changes in norms and routines lie in whether these journalists took these new subject matters and additional space to frame and source these stories differently.

### **5.1.1 Framing**

#### The Human Interest Frame

One interesting finding is that the conflict frame was not the most prevalent frame before and after the storm. The human interest frame was the most prevalent in 2004 and 2006. Nor were there any significant intercorrelations between both scales. One question in the control frame item list that sticks out is “Does the story refer to two sides or more than two sides of the problem or issue?” This question is at the heart of framing theory which aims to explore the parameters in which debate take place (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). However, this study found that for these two newspapers, human interest framing is most prevalent, even before the storm. What the storm does is heighten human interest framing which significantly increases in 2006.

The journalists themselves suggest why the human interest frame increases as they feel compassion and the stories are quite personal to them. One cops reporter described how he intensified the human interest approach to story telling:

“I always wanted to tell people’s stories, especially from the community. I was a police reporter before, the people I was encountering during Katrina; I was in the hood all day long, covering crime and police. So I understood. I kind of had a pulse of what the community was like. So I had a connection. And I think during Katrina, those tools that I was gathering before, as part of my arsenal, you know made it easier, because my heart was already with the community in the sense of trying to get the truth out, in that peel back the layers...and expose the humanity of people and circumstances. So those early days...to see that kind of suffering and not being able to do anything about it, but use their voices to tell their story, you know that was kind of not more pressure, but it was more important at that point.”

One explanation perhaps for why the human interest frame was also most prevalent before the storm is because crime and court stories were most prevalent before the storm. The human interest frame asks “How individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?” It also asks whether the story goes into the private or personal lives of others. Under the cops beat, journalists tend to come face to face readily with ordinary people be it at court, at crime scenes, at traffic accidents, etc. Many times their first account of details comes from regular people, victims and witnesses (Berkowitz and Beach, 1993). Before the storm, the *Times-Picayune* encountered high volumes of crime reports daily. One way to diversify that coverage was to show the human side of victims and perpetrators as described in the excerpt above. *The Sun-Herald*, on the other hand, has a market size that is a third of *The Times-Picayune*. Before the storm, *The Herald* was filled with metro and front page stories of profiles of community leaders, soldiers going off to war in Iraq, new school superintendents taking office and even the mayor falling ill and being temporarily hospitalized. This supports the findings of studies on local media where it assumes a community and sometimes civic role that is not found in national media. One such study on the reason why local media is on the rise when national media is declining is summed up in the book’s title “News is People” (Allen, 2001).

The measurement scales also provide more insight into the dominance of the human interest technique after the storm. When looking at the index, one of the main questions of the human interest frame asks “Does the story provide a human example or human face on the issue?” Another asks “Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?” The study’s finding, on a surface level, suggests these journalists did not change their overall



dominant framing technique from before the storm. Yet the bigger picture after the storm is that these journalists were in fact translating their own personal feelings into how they consequently shaped stories after the storm. They indicated in interviews that they would go out and cover the loss of others and come home to deal with their own. Their own self-pity was translating into compassion for others in the framing technique they used after the storm.

“After the storm, its kind of the same thing, you know the people are suffering...People who have been tossed into the wind, and are in Houston and are now being evicted. And now they still are homeless and now they’re living in abandoned housing and cars, so now its still important to try and tell their stories because beyond what this craft offers, whatever we’re trying to do as journalists, people, the real story of people and how they’re living. So the pressure is up there and I think we’re all getting a little fatigued trying to make sure, myself getting fatigued, trying to make sure we do that. Because a year later, as much progress has been made, there’s still such a long way to go and people are still suffering. So throw in the mix of that, you’re still a journalist, but sometimes its just like you’re pointing at things as a journalist, and saying look, look what’s going on, and so that’s the struggle. You as a human being, you want to get into the mix and help with what’s going on, but you are a journalist and you need to be somewhat removed in a sense, and so my role as a journalist, it’s really a unique situation.”

The human interest approach was most desirable to these journalists because of a natural connection to the circumstances of their readers. Therefore their framing technique reflects the human dimension of the story subject. Had Katrina occurred in another state, where corruption or politics dominate the news, unlike crime for New Orleans, then the dominant frame before the storm could have been either the conflict or attribution of responsibility frame.

### The Conflict Frame

During the norm, journalists frame stories by positing one opposing view against the other, as a back and forth to obtain balance (Neuman et. al, 1991). This best describes the conflict frame. Although the content analysis found an increase in the conflict frame

in 2006, it was still second to that of the human interest frame. It is easy to interpret by this finding that local journalists were not properly framing stories in terms of conflict or disagreement, or that maybe something else was taking place. The conflict frame asks if there are parties, individuals or groups that are in disagreement. It also asks if one group reproaches the other. The third item in the index asks if there are two sides to the story and the final whether there are winners and losers. Under normal circumstances, the conflict frame is heightened. The content analysis of 2004 showed strong conflict frames in city and local government as well as state legislature stories. In some cases, these stories contrasted the differing opinions of elected officials on legislative issues or in other words, elites against elites. At the local and city level, conflict occurred between parish and city council members and residents about ordinances. This represents the power struggle described in framing between decision makers and less powerful community and civic groups. Each group is battling to win some benefit from the debate, according to framing theory.

Hurricane Katrina changed this. In this case, several human interest stories, for instance, would feature how slowly a particular neighborhood or ward was taking to recover. What was a novelty about these stories, that was not evident in 2004, is that these features included how elected representatives had also lost their homes like residents and were crusading for the same benefits as residents. Story leads would open with narratives of residents tirelessly gutting or clearing away their homes while their elected officials, also their neighbors, were doing the same. When looking at the conflict frame's fourth item, that of winners and losers, both elected officials and ordinary people were both losers in the destructive path of Katrina. Therefore the elites or powerful, in the

local community, were reduced somewhat to the same stature as ordinary people. Therefore, they were not in disagreement of the realities of their circumstances, nor about what it would take for them to rebuild their lives. In these stories, residents and officials were not reproaching each other, but common enemies: the storm and slow federal assistance. There was an agreement on who was to blame. Additionally, there was only one side of the story coming from both camps and that was “we need help.” One reporter offered an explanation for why a human interest approach was taken toward two typically sparring groups, officials and their constituents, instead of the often used conflict frame.

“...there were times when I would be interviewing the mayor, the council president, or some other official, and they would just break down and cry. They would say, I don’t know when we’re going to get this up and running, or that working. They would even share their own personal problems with me, everything they’d lost, how they were going to rebuild their lives. I never experienced that before. Sometimes, I just had to take a step back and give them a moment. I’d say we were a bit sympathetic with them in the beginning. I, mean, nothing like this had ever happened, as far as I know, in America. We were sympathetic with them or you can say, we cut them some slack. There was kind of a honeymoon period. But those days are over. Now it’s about holding them accountable for what they do or don’t do.”

Whether or not these reporters continued to be actually tougher with elected officials is not reflected in the findings. For one, the attribution of responsibility index did not increase in the second half of 2006, but decreased. Secondly, when reading articles, many of the stories within the *Sun-Herald* leaped praise on Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, U.S. senators and representatives for fighting for federal aid dollars. Similarly, the *Times-Picayune*’s reports suggested that Louisiana’s two U.S. senators were working tirelessly to bring home federal aid. Reports seemed to be critical of an overall slow recovery pace or described the frustration of local officials, but they were not critical of these elected officials outright. It seemed almost as though tension with officials was

reduced after the storm given the magnitude of the rebuilding process. When it came to local government reports, stories focused on different ways in which to rebuild local infrastructure, budget cutbacks and constraints, public services being restored and the like. These topics that would have been framed in terms of conflict or tension before were being frame as progress reports or information updates for constituents and the public.

A leadership roundtable videotaped for the accompanying project for this study included both the executive editors of both papers used in this study and the mayors for New Orleans and Biloxi. On the Biloxi side, both mayor and editor described a strong work relationship between both government and media that supports the rebuilding process. This is reminiscent of social commitment and information management role natural disaster studies have found the local media to do. In the case of these two newspapers, this role has solidified and extended out a year and a half after the storm. On the New Orleans side, the editor spoke of forceful leadership under the mayor, but surprisingly the mayor found the paper to be just as critical of local government as before the storm. This may be because as the mayor admitted in the panel discussion, his “words seem to get him into trouble.” It may be that the mayor feels harshly dealt with for the human interest profile stories about his controversial statements, and not necessarily from consistent conflict framing or blame on how he is handling the recovery.

These anecdotal scenarios once again reinforce why the conflict frame is not as prevalent as the human interest frame because there is no disagreement between elites and constituents about the current situation and the challenges ahead. Although there might be disagreement on how to move forward, all groups are instead receiving a fair share at the public debating table. The media therefore is less hostile to all options for

recovery, be it from the local government, civic groups, recovery teams and the business community. This may in fact be a shift to what Entman (2003) describes as frame parity or equal treatment of frames, where one frame or side of a frame is discussed and featured to the same degree as the other. Instead of two ideas in one frame being pitted against one another in the same story, each frame of how to solve a particular recovery dilemma is being pursued separately with its merits and drawbacks. In the results, one reporter described this as progress or lack of progress reporting. The mayor of New Orleans even commented during the roundtable that he wished *The Times-Picayune* would reduce reporting its own suggestions or alternatives of how the recovery should proceed and give his plans a chance. What the mayor is acknowledging is that a framing contest is taking place between his administrations recovery vision and those of other groups being adequately fleshed out in the newspaper. This emergence of frame parity in framing contests in itself is counter-hegemonic in nature. These journalists are giving power to civic and other groups by putting their options in front the public on an equal footing as the paper does for the local government's plans. Therefore the conflict index, as it is designed to measure framing in the norm does not effectively describe framing contests post-Katrina. Conflict is taking place, but in a different format when introduced in distinct stories and on a more equal plane, as more frame options are explored adequately to those who hold power locally.

For now, the generic indices are reflecting the human interest frame as the strongest because journalists are still approaching these types of stories in the same manner that they did in 2004. Furthermore, they have expanded the human interest approach to all types of stories, from politics to crime a year later, because the human

suffering is still strong, evident in an increase in suicide and depression stories. One reporter painted a picture of what this is like:

“You drive around the city and there is this cloud hanging over the city, and you can see how serious the situation was and is today, and I think that’s the part that I have to keep reminding myself of, but that I have to sit back sometimes and clear loose some thoughts and say, this is absolutely insane, oh its still very insane, and what happened was insane, the death, the destruction, the fact that, you know I think its obvious but even in places in Houston where there is a backlash against the evacuees, for various reasons, nobody asked for this to happen, you know I think that’s the part, nobody ever asked for their lives to be flipped upside down, nobody asked for the levies to break. So the people out there are still suffering even today.”

### Episodic and Thematic Framing

Another measure of significant change is an increase in thematic stories. Most studies on thematic and episodic frames looked at national and television samples (Iyengar, 1991). These news outlets must appeal to more diverse markets, and so taking news events and applying them to larger, more commonly experienced societal trends are common among national news sources. In 2004, thematic news stories were considerably low in number and in length. This suggests that local journalists were expected to meet the reading needs and attentions of a local audience. However, a significant increase in length and number for thematic stories in 2006 indicated a clear change. In the interviews, these journalists stated that they now place simple news events into a larger context of Katrina. For instance, a crime is not an isolated event as it would have consistently been reported in 2004. Instead, it is a crime that is part of the Katrina landscape, triggered by a certain aftermath effect that is affecting a certain group of people. For these Katrina thematic stories, the reporters include analysis from experts and researchers nationwide and compare the issue to similar circumstances elsewhere. This helps solidify these Katrina connected stories as thematic in nature. They also do not

merely write about news events from local government or elsewhere, but they analyze it through these progress or lack of progress reports. The journalists stated that their reporting is more invested with the aim of helping readers understand what is at stake with any new development at this difficult time in their lives. Some of these thematic stories read like best practices guides, according to one editor, that help residents rebuild their lives:

“And by that I mean explaining to them rules on flood elevation, explaining to them insurance, how to get things done. I see the [newspaper] right now as a practical guide on how to live here. It’s hard to live here right now if you have all these questions and no answers. And they see the newspaper in an issue that has lots of complexity and complicated answers that don’t lend themselves well to television, they lend themselves perfectly to print, we take the time to explain these issues carefully and I think people realize that, and are very engaged because they want to get a good understanding of what the issues are going to be there.”

These statements all explain a shift toward more thematic stories complimenting episodic news accounts.

The attitude toward these Katrina thematic stories is ambivalent. Some reporters and editors describe internal bets about the year in which the word Katrina will not be published in the paper or used as background in a story. Some reporters are resigned that it will be along time until they can stop explaining Katrina anomalies. One reporter shared this recent experience when leaving the city:

“I didn’t travel for a while after the storm and for a little while you feel like it’s very surreal. You go all of a sudden you’re in the airport, like Boston or something, and you’re like everyone is walking around like everything is cool, and it is cool there, they’re not thinking about Katrina. I mean maybe once in a while, but you know. Here, it’s like a thing, you know, it never really goes away. It’s sort of seeped into everything. And you know, it makes for a lot of good stories but sometimes you know...we have a friend who’s thinking about moving and he’s a reporter, and he says people, when he’s interviewing for a job, editors will say, why would you want to leave that story. You know, it’s the greatest story of your life. He’s like; I can’t wait to leave

this story, its just Katrina, Katrina, Katrina, Katrina, enough already!  
So it's kind of a double edges sword I guess.”

### 5.1.2 Sourcing

#### Routine Sourcing after the Storm

Although these journalists have made significant, but still moderate changes in how they frame the news on a daily basis, at least in the short term, they clearly are sourcing the news in more diverse ways. As evident in the content analysis, routine sources, which include officials and spokespersons at government, law enforcement and corporate levels, remained consistently above non-routine sources before and after the storm. This is inherent in the journalists own strife about juggling their attachment to the Katrina story with professional ideals they struggled to define or maintain in the post-Katrina work environment. These journalists decried the pressure for objectivity, and seemed to glorify their new found attachment to stories. However the common thread was that either their credibility or that of the newspaper's always came first. Therefore, it was important to pepper stories with official and affiliated sources even as they increased the perspectives of unaffiliated or ordinary sources, who were traditionally marginalized in their past routines.

This continued reliance on official sources, according to one editor should not be cast aside:

“You have to make sure that you stick to the facts or you're commenting on them, let's say its Mayor Nagin, you're only commenting on him in his role as mayor, and I think that we have not, we will not abandon any of those standards, if not use Katrina as a license to forget everything we've learned in journalism, I think we've learned some things about journalism. I think we've learned some things about what people want out of their local paper, but they still want an objective, credible source of information. They want to believe that if I've read the *Times Picayune*, that I'm reading an earnest honest attempt to get me the best possible information and they're transparent, they're telling me where they got their information. No we're not



bloggers, we don't throw stuff out there randomly, we don't just read other media and comment on it, our job is to tell you the information and to tell you where we got it."

Additionally, when reporters felt that relying on official sources did not confirm their convictions, they turned more to documents to solidify their claims. This was evident in coding for sourcing, when coders questioned whether documents should be considered sources based on the agencies they came from. Many of the stories mixed official quotes, documents, memos and findings to support claims. One reporter describes below how documents are now more important on a whole when challenging controversial issues, that merely official sources.

"Most of the time what I'm doing is I'm working from documents and other people. And dealing with what's going on. I'm able to actually pull up the information. One of these issues was why did FEMA not send in the materials and people it needed the first day or two after the storm. And I had actually called to Emergency Preparedness officials, local, and they basically all told me the same story, that when they lost communications and that was a big problem, they all went through the hurricane exercise they had before and they had an outline that was supposed to be done in these situations that had been put together with FEMA officials. And it was in a bind folder on their bookshelf and they just pulled it down off the shelf and well on day two is says this and on day three they'll do this and I guess that's what they're gonna do. And that information was going to say what we'll be doing. It's that sort of reporting that we did that was able to explain, in terms of what people understood what was going on. That was my way of making sure that the criticism I was feeling, that was backing up with the facts. That the facts actually go through that. And on the other side, a lot of the problems that Michael Brown had both in the long term of the storm as FEMA was changing its role and in the short term as Brown was attempting to get more help out of the other agencies that was supposed to be helping him and was finding trouble doing it, we reported it as well."

Therefore reporters used their own hunches and new found insight or expertise on the Katrina disaster to drive their investigations. But they employed old methods of maintaining credibility in sourcing controversial or critical claims. Even in an attempt to ward off bias, the reporter above, despite getting both local emergency officials and their memos and documents to back up his criticism of the federal government, still offered

some explanation for FEMA's failures. It shows a deep entrenchment in sourcing patterns found in the field studies and sourcing studies. A journalist's reputation is central to their effectiveness. This was evident in Dan Rather's reports using falsified documents that erupted in a scandal during the 2004 presidential elections. Many journalists have fallen from grace at major national newspapers for interviewing sources that never existed. As the editor indicated above, Katrina may have taught these local journalists how to connect with their readers, but cautioned that their claims must be factually supported.

Particularly when it comes to controversial stories, prior studies have shown that journalists and their editors will "sit" on stories until they have double checked facts and attribution.

Another technique journalists use during the norm is ensuring that officials or official documents support their claims. This takes away blame or reproach from the journalists and onto the official entity that is being cited after the story is published. In the case of the above example, the local reporter was unwilling to attack a federal agency unless he was shielded by official support for his claim. The point here is not that this practice should be abandoned since these local journalists are now in some way experts on the issues facing their communities. Neither did Gans (1979) or Tuchman (1978) conclude that there was anything disadvantageous about this practice. This study supports that this technique takes place and that even in prolonged disaster settings continues to be applied. These journalists indicated that they were all too aware of the stakes involved in each story written about their cities. Therefore it was crucial to launch well researched arguments or criticism if they needed to be effective. These journalists also indicated that

they feel pressure to source stories effectively both with documents and officials if their reports are to be taken seriously. One reporter said:

“If anything I’m more pessimistic now than before the storm the ability of my reporting to affect what will happen in the future. I continue to be concerned about a variety of the issues that I’m covering, the potential that coastal restoration will have enough money to do something quickly about dealing with our problems with restoration of wetlands, whether or not the design work will protect us from the kinds of hurricanes that we are at risk of experiencing. I continue to be concerned about the ability of the Core of Engineers to provide the level of protection necessary in the future for the potential of hurricanes that faces us. I think that’s a problem. I think the ability of the state to convince Congress to provide the state with enough money that it needs to rebuild the wetlands south of the city for coastal protection that protects the fisheries that are important to the state’s economy but also help protect against hurricanes. And I’m deeply concerned about the federal response to hurricanes. And if by anything, my concern is that things are going to get worse, if not better and the lessons learned from Katrina, I just don’t see the efforts being made to revamp the federal response in ways that really need to be done to provide a single agency control over everything....”

### Non-routine Sourcing after the Storm

Given this position above, these journalists took the route of diversifying sources. The mean scores for non-routine sources increased in 2006 and this was particularly true for unaffiliated U.S. citizens, person belonging to no agencies and the common man. These three categories are most noteworthy because they were significantly higher in their grouping of non-routine sources. For example, in the source agency type category, the other source agencies such as non-profit, educational and civic, while they are considered marginalized sources, are used during the norm. However, people belonging to no agency at all were quoted significantly higher than all the other groups. This is a clear departure from the norm. Therefore, journalists abandoned the notion that sources must represent a group or speak on behalf of a group for their opinions to be valid. The individual opinion was sought out instead. This is true for the unaffiliated U.S. citizen who was quoted as a “man on the street.” Gans (1979) points out that journalists look for

sources that are articulate and can phrase their opinions that best suit what journalists are looking for. However, the common man or man on the street, who is not affiliated with any agency, would offer a more passionate or raw response or comment to journalists' questions. This helps support the intensity these journalists felt in telling the stories of ordinary people, in an unadulterated fashion, that helped convey their frustration and loss.

Journalists also look for sources that are reliable and credible according to Gans (1979). During the norm, they consider sources from non-profits, the corporate world and community groups as having an agenda and therefore slanting their information for their own purposes. In this study, these journalists went straight for sources they considered even less reliable and credible. These unaffiliated sources could not have been traced to any entities in terms of determining an agenda. Nor did these journalists have any prior experience with these sources to measure whether they were trustworthy in the past and would be so in the future. The average man on the street did not necessarily always offer a fact-based opinion. This study illustrated one reporter who could not come to terms with the fact that these unaffiliated sources had lied to him when covering the chaos at the Superdome. He felt that because they were suffering, they would not lie about their own circumstances. Perhaps, again it is that identification with the circumstances of the ordinary man that explains why these journalists would find them credible when they did not before the storm. These journalists are also aware that national media attention has drifted away from the plight of their readers and indicated that they hold an obligation in telling the stories of ordinary citizens. This shift in non-routine sourcing is in part a result of the dominant human interest approach to post-Katrina day to day coverage. Some other journalists have seen this as reconciling past wrong doing. Another reporter felt

ashamed during the disaster for not going into poorer neighborhoods to better understand these communities. After the storm this journalist attempted to make amends by reaching out to these residents and better reporting their plights.

Another significant finding lies in where sourcing and framing overlap. Changes in sourcing helped bolster changes in generic framing as seen with the human interest frame. Yet, the common man or man on the street was proportionally higher in the conflict frame for 2006 than it was in 2004. Therefore, the common man or man on the street was not merely sought out to portray a victim or human dimension to a story alone. The common man was elevated by journalists to be included as part of framing debates. Therefore framing contests put forward by elites or influential groups were also vetted by the ordinary man. These journalists were therefore measuring the merits of these debates in the eyes of the common man. During the norm, elites and influential groups debate issues with out a third perspective and particularly not one from common folks. The Katrina experience put the ordinary man at the heart of the debate. Once again, this can be traced to the fact that many journalists were reduced to the circumstances of the ordinary man. They too wanted to know when their street lights were coming on, when they could apply for assistance, when they must get rid of their FEMA trailers and so on. Given the confines of journalism, these journalists felt restricted from putting their own analysis without attribution. Therefore, including the thoughts and comments of an unaffiliated, ordinary citizen, was a way for them to send a message to officials about how their constituents, including journalists, felt about progress.

### 5.1.3 Norms and Routines

#### Editors and Reporters, New Found Trust

A crucial part of journalists being able to do the unconventional is a nod to their editors allowing them to do the unconventional. Research on norms and routines outline a hierarchical structure in the newsroom. Journalists are assigned stories from editors and journalists must also pitch their stories to editors. The editor therefore stands guard over what is done and how it is done. This refutes the claim made by journalists that they operate in an autonomous fashion when much of their work routine is dictated by their bosses. Tuchman (1978) points out that only senior reporters are given a measure of freedom or influence over editors in terms of the direction their stories should take. One reporter who was still on his first year probation when the storm hit stated that Katrina interrupted reliable forms of communication journalists use, such as cellphones and emails, to communicate regularly with editors while in the field or when filing their stories. It was that initial situation that bolstered the reporter on the ground and placed confidence in their reports on the part of editors.

“So later that evening, I finally got through to our editors...and I was like asking him, what should I be doing? Is there anything I should be reporting on in particular? He was like, just do what you’re doing...there was no plan as to people should be doing A, B and C, so I just kept doing what I was doing, talking to people...I was a lone maverick out there in the streets.”

Reporters stated that they contacted friends and relatives, temporarily staying in other cities, who then called the editors and dictated the stories. Reporters were unable to hear back from editors on queries about their stories because of the scattered news force and poor communication that lasted at least two weeks. This early breakdown in copy flow meant editors had to rely on their reporters discretion on what constituted news and the

accuracy of their accounts. Gatekeeping studies have looked to editors and producers who apply their subjectivity in deciding the news. But journalists on the ground became the decision makers during Katrina. Editors were forced to rely on the copy journalists submitted without being able to contact them to verify information. This created a shift in those who hold power in the newsroom to shape and frame the news. Once communication was restored, or newsrooms reopened, these journalists indicated stronger trust relationships with their editors. This immediate shift in who held power to frame in the newsroom hierarchy helps explain a more human interest frame. This is because reporters on the ground, who were witnessing the human suffering, were framing the news and not editors in newsrooms who did not have a handle on the scope of the devastation. During the norm, particularly for national and foreign correspondents, other examples of scenarios where reporters are separated from editors, editors still determine how news on the ground should be shaped (Wu and Hamilton, 2004). In the case of Katrina, those initial days where reporters became decision makers continues to impact the tone of coverage a year later.

### Experts on the Facts

Journalists are considered to be intermediaries who sort through information provided by others, sources, and who present that information according to certain framing techniques. Gulf Coast journalists stated that Hurricane Katrina turned them into experts.

“...[Katrina] changed our reporting, changed the tone of what we wrote about, because we knew intimately what we were talking about. And spoke with, we didn’t have to force ourselves to be authoritative. It came naturally, because it was our collective life that we led. And that has continued to this day. We are a very different newspaper now than from a year ago. We are living through the recovery of New Orleans in the same way that our readers are, and almost everything that we write

about, and cover in our newspaper is in some way connected to the Hurricane and the aftermath. And I think it will be that way for some time.”

The journalists indicated that this expertise was translated into the many speaking events they addressed nationally, becoming almost ambassadors for not only local media but the people of the communities. They also stated that national media used them as sources during the disaster and continue to quote them to this day. When looking at news content in 2006, many generalizations were made that were not attributed to a source or agency. Additionally, many stories painted descriptions of the changing community landscape almost in the first person omniscient. These all supported the inclusion of the reporter as an expert writing with authority on the subject matter. One such journalistic ideal is to remain detached. While these journalists preferred being balanced, they abandoned detachment to bring realism to their reports.

#### Katrina Burn Out: Reporters and Tragedy

It is quite clear that shaking off the effects of Katrina was difficult for these journalists to do as evident in a downward spiral among a few in their ranks. The results indicate that during the storm, reporters were focused on covering stories and not on their own personal loss. Biographical works and field studies looking at newswriters in disaster or crisis settings indicate that these journalists are given time off on return from treacherous assignments or are rotated into other beats that allow them to distance themselves from the tragedy they witnessed (Wu and Hamilton, 2004). Likewise, natural disaster studies show that the work places of journalists are unaffected by disasters and even more so for their homes. These Gulf Coast journalists continued to work in the tragedy and continue to do so today. Many of them indicated that they needed to continue working to support their families for fear of losing their jobs when their news



organizations seemed unstable immediately after the storm. Others felt that for local journalists, Katrina offered a rare opportunity for them to cover wide-scale tragedy. To them it was the height of their professional careers as local journalists. For whatever reason that local journalists worked tirelessly during the storm and to this day, they all indicated some measure of fatigue that have forced some of them to take jobs elsewhere. Others who have remained indicated that they increasingly feel frustrated and pessimistic about their current situation and future prospects of their communities. That internal stress also plays out in the workplace with tensions existing between journalists who remained in the city to cover the storm and others who reported from remote locations. Although the Katrina experience was one that brought coworkers together, many of the reporters indicated some divides in the newsroom. One reporter recalled:

“I was able to see some things that were going on between the two groups of reporters. That is problematic or has continued to be problematic a year later. The reporters who were in the city that first week, really were going through some horrendous experiences. A lot of people ran into dead bodies, a lot of people were just actually sitting there in flooded areas for days at a time worried about looting and crime and everything else that was going on. Some of the reporters were actually pulled over and roughed up by cops. There were some really life threatening situations that they were going through.

While there were other reporters, and I’m amongst them, who went through this process of feeling the initial concern of getting out of the building and then being in Baton Rouge, which was a much more safe environment and not understanding what the other reporters were going through. At times there was tension between those two groups because there was a lack of understanding. And that’s continued on to this day, its still a problem and probably will continue to be a problem. Its some of that post traumatic stress scenario type stuff. A lot of things will be going on for a lot of reporters for a long while.”

Thus it is fair to assume that they will continue to experience the aftermath to the same degree as their readers for some time to come.

## Advocacy Journalism

Themes introduced by these journalists can also be contrasted with findings from the news content. One area of change occurred with Internet use, specifically blogging. It gave rise to the release of personal reportage by these journalists. The prevalence in the human interest frame is perhaps an extension of that catharsis, but masked under the norms of journalism. Additionally, these journalists indicated that they valued community journalism. They recalled feedback from residents during the disaster, and continued support and love from online forums. This helped bolster their sense of commitment to the common man as evident in the inclusion of more unaffiliated and ordinary sources in conflict and human interest framing. Additionally, the human interest frame is also subtly injected as these journalists are now writing articles that profile their own loss and recovery. Many of these newsrooms have seen reshuffling of editors from lighter news sections such as sports and features, now heading up the newsroom. The convergence of news beats and specialty roles also supports a leaning toward a more compassionate framing of the news, typified by the human interest frame.

For major metropolitan newspapers, there is an unspoken rule to distinguish from tabloids and community newspapers and establish the standard for professionalism. However, as *Times Picayune* executive editor Jim Amos stated in his interview, he will not apologize for advocating and will use the most effective means of the newspaper to do so. Many of these journalists said they were increasingly becoming convinced that their new found passion is as a result of reinstating themselves as the voice of the community since the storm.

“I think there was outrage involved in those headlines and it was warranted if anything underplayed. What happened during those first five days was absolutely ridiculous and horrendous and based on my own reporting experience should not have happened...At all levels there were a lot of balls dropped. And we haven't pulled our punches but in being balanced and careful in our criticism have pretty much been on point.”

As Jim Amos puts it, Katrina will dominate their news coverage for some time to come. What this study does highlight though, is that while these journalists are attempting to mount challenges to their work routines to better cover their cities after Katrina, they do wrestle with the confines in which the profession sets up for them to operate in. Although these journalists might settle for adjusting these professional ideals to fit their current circumstances, they are not prepared to flat out abandon any of them. What will determine the degree to which these changes will persist in the years to come goes hand in hand with the pace in which conditions deteriorate or improve in their communities. In other words, a return to the norm in society may determine a full return to the norm for these journalists.

## **CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Limitations and Future Research**

Therefore, future research could begin to track these changes on a longitudinal basis. Within five years, will there be a complete return to the norm? Or will there be more drastic adjustments to the norm at these newspapers or among Gulf Coast news outlets across media, including television and radio. One strength of this study is that it looked at two newspapers in two different cities along the Gulf Coast and considered them together. Although this may be a case study, it helps strengthen the argument that these changes are consistent with a trend taking place with these journalists and not just an isolated phenomenon at one newsroom affected by the disaster. Further study on these Gulf Coast journalists can look at other forms of media, particularly broadcast media. Television and radio journalists face bigger hurdles in breaking news routines (Kurpius, 2001). Evidence of changes in routines for Gulf Coast broadcast journalists could shed new light on ways broadcasters can become more effective.

In terms of framing theory, this study considered generic frames because they have the widest application to stories neutral of subject matter. Additional studies can begin to measure issue-specific framing based on the new subject matters Katrina introduced. This study saw tremendous increases in the “other” affiliation and agency type and “the common man.” Issue-specific framing and sourcing can begin to define who these increasing non-routine sources are during crisis and whether there is any pattern to them. It can also help establish the counter-hegemonic argument better when these non-routine sources are more specifically compared to specific frames.

Another limitation of this study is that its part-qualitative approach only features a small portion of the thoughts of hundreds of journalists along the Gulf Coast. It does not indicate how widespread the trends are in changed perspectives toward journalistic ideals. The content analysis helped provide reliability between what these journalists said and whether they were implementing their own words in some form or fashion. However, it does not indicate how long the trend can be sustained if only a small segment of journalists along the Gulf Coast are adjusting their routines to the current circumstances. Journalists thrive on the status quo, as prior literature suggests, and the status quo is validated by consensus. More field work or quantitative methods are needed to access the lives of these local journalists on a far wider basis than this study offered.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Hurricane Katrina provided a unique set of conditions for people to thrive and rebuild their lives. It has done the same for Gulf Coast journalism by breathing new sense of purpose and meaning into it. Although its effect and scope is measurably small, its impact is far greater as journalism; print in particular, experiences a decline in audience readership and participation. Hurricane Katrina may have brought a whirlwind of calamity for those who suffered its wrath, but in some positive measure, it has brought a moment of clarity for those who report it.

That clarity allowed them to reach deep into the tools that journalism offers them and adapt these tools to navigate through disaster coverage that continues to have no end in sight in its aftermath. This study found that these journalists have been affected by the tragedy from losing all they own, to being moved by the destruction they witnessed all around them. This direct exposure to disaster has generated a sense of outrage,

compassion and frustration among these journalists. They see the Katrina aftermath as a very personal one and approach each story with a sense of how people are impacted by it. They have determined to be integral in helping people rebuild their lives and shaping the debate on the recovery process. Therefore, they explore stories in more complexity and detail using the thematic technique increasingly after the storm. Through thematic stories, they are able to broadly explore complex issues like flood insurance, levy protection and coastal restoration to simple stories like how to raise homes. They therefore are fulfilling the social commitment role that local media assumes during natural disasters. In the case of Gulf Coast journalists, this role continues to a year and a half from the storm.

Journalism ideals like objectivity, fairness and balance are still maintained years after the storm because Gulf Coast journalists believe these values are crucial to establishing credibility in their news organizations. However, the notion that journalists should remain detached was completely abandoned by these journalists. There is now an unapologetic association with the plight of the common man because these journalists now see themselves as a part of the community and not removed from it. They therefore turn to the common man to represent the opinions, thoughts and concerns of a community joined together by destruction; a community that now includes the journalist. They have placed the common man at the negotiating table when framing debates which challenged prior norms and routines that marginalized unaffiliated sources. Therefore not only the powerful or elites are able to frame the recovery process but other groups as well. When looking at framing theory, a prolonged state of crisis, brought on by a natural disaster, can bring about framing contests and frame parity.

How sustained these early signs of change will be, it could be as long as Katrina is a story, or as long as these journalists embrace the lessons they are learning from it. One sign that unconventional journalism may persist among Gulf Coast journalists is underscored by an increased frustration toward the slow pace of recovery and pessimism about the future of their communities. That passion may very well drive them to continue along a path that strives to improve journalism at the local level when crisis has changed the fabric of the community and in effect the work environment for journalists. Times Picayune executive editor sums up the difference for him best:

“Usually what happens in newspapers is that reporters and photographers come into people’s lives in a moment of great crisis and write about the crisis and the trauma and then they go home and the next day they come in and they have a different assignment and that’s the paradigm. In our case, we were in the crisis ourselves and everything that was happening in our readers lives were happening in our own lives individually. We were going to see people who had lost everything and who had lost their houses, and reporting about that and then we were coming home to our spouses who had lost everything and our own houses were gone. And so I think this identification with our readers, the sharing of the same fate as our readers, changed us profoundly.”

Popular belief suggests that for local journalism, there is an assumed connection and fate between the media and the community. This study showed that this link was strengthened by Hurricane Katrina, but it also showed that the storm created a connection for some journalists who never felt a true bond with the people. The implications are clear for local journalism where major events or topics do not bind the journalist to the people rendering daily reportage that seems removed or not invested in the community. This study dispelled the notion that simply doing local journalism guarantees that local journalists will automatically grasp their environment. A disaster such as Katrina uncovered an often overlooked disconnect between local journalism and the community. Local journalism that is relevant and effective is not a given because a journalist knows

every side street and bullet-ridden neighborhood. It requires effort on the part of the journalist and a sharing of the same fate that propels the journalist to cover the local community in the interest of all.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SAMPLE CONSTRUCTED WEEK**

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#### **Sample Constructed Week**

Week 1: 2004

Monday, June 28, 2004

Tuesday, February 3, 2004

Wednesday, May 26, 2004

Thursday, April 22, 2004

Friday, March 19, 2004

Saturday, March 6, 2004

Sunday, April 11, 2004

Week 2: 2004

Monday, August 2, 2004

Tuesday, September 28, 2004

Wednesday, August 4, 2004

Thursday, August 26, 2004

Friday, November 26, 2004

Saturday, November 27, 2004

Sunday, June 4, 2004

Week 1: 2006

Monday, May 29, 2006

Tuesday, February 7, 2006

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Thursday, May 4, 2006

Friday, May 24, 2006

Saturday, June 3, 2006

Sunday, January 9, 2006

Week 2: 2006

Monday, November 20, 2006

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Thursday, October 19, 2006

Friday, July 21, 2006

Saturday, September 2, 2006

Sunday, August 27, 2006

## APPENDIX B

### FRAMING SCALE

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#### Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) Framing items

Story # \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_ Length (inches) \_\_\_\_\_

*Indicate 1 for Yes, 0 for No.*

Is the story: Episodic \_\_\_\_\_

Is the story Thematic \_\_\_\_\_

Attribution of responsibility

Does the story suggest that some level of gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem?

Does the story suggest that some level of government is responsible for the issue/problem?

Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?

Does the story suggest that an ind. (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue-problem?

Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

#### Human interest frame

Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?

Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?

Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?

Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion?

#### Conflict frame

Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?

Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?

Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?

Does the story refer to winners and losers?

#### Morality frame

Does the story contain any moral message?

Does the story make reference to morality, God and other religious tenets?

Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

#### Economic frame

Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?

Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?

Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing a course of action?

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## APPENDIX C

### SOURCING INDEX

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**Source #**      **1**                      **2**                      **3**                      **4**                      **5**

*Indicate 1 for Yes, 0 for No.*

**Source Affiliation:**

U.S. Government

Local Government

Foreign Government

Affiliated U.S. Citizen

Unaffiliated U.S. Citizen

Foreign Citizen

Other

**Agency/Institution Type:**

Governmental

Corporate/Business

Non-governmental/non-profit

Law-Enforcement

Educational

Civic

Other

None

**Source Status:**

Executive

Spokesman (also Legal Representative)

Worker/Employee

Position not specified

Victim

Eyewitness

Ordinary/Common man (“Average Man/Woman on the Street)

Perpetrator

Other

(Berkowitz, 1987)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Questions:**

- 1) What were some of your challenges in covering Hurricane Katrina during the week of the storm?
- 2) How did you overcome those challenges?
- 3) How has covering Hurricane Katrina impacted how you approach your work a year later?
- 4) What role did the Internet play during the storm and what role does it play now?
- 5) To what degree does your own personal experience of being affected by Hurricane Katrina impact your news coverage and how do you mix the two or separate them?
- 6) What specific things do you do differently as a result of experiencing Hurricane Katrina that you didn't do before the storm with regards to your reporting?
- 7) What changes have you seen or experienced in your work or in your news organization as a result of Katrina?

## **VITA**

Shearon Roberts is a native of Trinidad and Tobago and received her bachelor's degree in mass communication from Dillard University in 2005. She was the valedictorian of Dillard University's class of 2005 and completed her degree with a 4.0 grade point average. She has worked at numerous media outlets such as The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Times-Picayune as a reporting intern. She plans to continue working as a journalist after graduation as a news reporter.