

Women in Newspaper Newsroom Management: 1949 to 1979

**Stephen Lacy, Lucinda Davenport,
and Carolyn Miller**

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Abstract

This study of the number of newspaper newsroom managers who were women found an overall trend of slow but steady growth during the 1950s and 1960s, with stagnation in the 1970s. The two-decade growth was prompted primarily by the doubling of managerial positions in the newsroom. Although the absolute number of women managers increased, the percentage of newsroom managers who were women was either 25 or 27 percent in all four years measured. Figures from 1995 indicate that the number of women in managerial positions had increased to 32 percent. However, this is only five percentage points above the 27 percent figure found here for women managers in 1959. The one area growth in the 1970s was women in newsroom management positions traditionally held by men (city editor, state editor, sports editor, etc.). The percentage of all women newsroom managers who held these positions increased from 11 percent in 1949 to 48 percent in 1979.

Introduction

During the years since World War II, the percentage of women in the workforce has increased steadily. In 1940, 25 percent of women worked; that figure increased to 34 percent in 1950 and 58 percent in 1990. By 2000, the percentage is projected to be 63.1

The number of women in management has also increased during this period, but the pattern differed from the growth of women in the workforce. Karsten reported that during the 1940s and 1950s, women in management were not keeping pace with the growth of women in the workforce. She points out that employment antidiscrimination laws passed in the 1960s allowed women to pursue a variety of jobs, including management positions. As a result, the percentage of employed women who were managers increased from 4.5 percent in 1970 to 13.8 percent in 1991, which was about equal to the 13.4 percent of employed men who were managers. The percentage of managers who were women grew from 22 percent in 1970 to 40.6 percent in 1991.²

As in the general workforce, newspaper management seems to have become more accessible for women after the 1970s.³ However, the growth was not easy. A series of gender discrimination lawsuits at organizations such as The New York Times, Newsday and the Associated Press helped to make male managers more sensitive to their promotion practices.⁴ Since the late 1970s, newspapers have seen some growth in the percentage of managers who are women. Despite this recent interest in women in newspaper management, little research is available about this topic during the period between World War II and the late 1970s.

This study fills some gaps in the history of women in newspaper decision-making positions. Specifically, the study examines the number of women in newspaper management from 1949 to 1979 and factors that may have affected the management trends. This period is worthy of study because it bridges a time when women had limited professional options with a period when women gained more freedom to pursue a variety of professions. Understanding this transitional period will help to explain what is occurring today.

Background

The study of women in newspaper management is interesting because such research allows a comparison with the overall trends of women in management. It also is important because gender appears to be related to readership. Newspaper research throughout the years has shown consistently that fewer women than men read newspapers.⁵ McGrath noted, when women do have time to read, many prefer to read paperbacks or magazines.⁶ Perhaps women do not relate to newspapers because newspapers do not relate to women. Studies consistently show that newspapers have comparatively few female quotations or references within stories, few females in photographs, few articles that relate to women and few female bylines.⁷ When media portray women, it is not always accurate, comprehensive or fair.⁸

It's no wonder that the newspaper is perceived as "men talking to men" when it is predominately men who are in the decision-making positions. Men do not experience lives as women, and they tend to hire in their own image; thus, male editors usually hire male reporters and writers who think similarly.⁹

Research indicates that gender affects content decision-making, as well as reading of papers. Robinson found that the number of stories, the amount of space and the prominence of stories relating to women increased as the percentage of women in decision-making positions at newspapers increased.¹⁰ Greenwald compared female and male editors and found the female editor used more female bylines than the male editor even though he supervised more female reporters.¹¹ Smaller-market newspapers generally have more women managers,¹² and Bridge found that smaller newspapers also consistently outperformed larger papers in front-page coverage of women.¹³ Mills noted several Pulitzer stories that ran in newspapers because women in the newsroom brought a new perspective and focus to subjects often overlooked by men.¹⁴ MORI research has found that when newspapers have strong female readerships, they also have strong female editors. The Daytona Beach News-Journal and the Phoenix newspapers serve as examples.¹⁵

This relationship between manager's gender and content decisions combined with antidiscrimination lawsuits to spur interest in the late 1970s about women in management. A 1978 national study of 1,700 daily newspapers showed that women made up 2.7 percent of managerial positions in daily newspapers with circulations above 25,000, and overall comprised 5 percent of supervisory editors' positions.¹⁶ In 1987, The National Federation of Press Women found that women represented only 1.5 percent of top editorial positions in newspapers with 100,000 circulation or more.¹⁷

Journey made 10 annual studies of women in newsroom management. Using the Editor & Publisher International Year Book, she found in 1978 there were 5.2 percent of women as directing editors: in 1979, 6.5; in 1980, 7.0; in 1981, 7.6; in 1982, 9.6; in 1983, 10.6; in 1984, 11.1; in 1985, 11.7; in 1986, 12.4; and in 1987, 13.0.¹⁸ Journey noted in her ninth search that three quarters of U.S. daily and Sunday editions listed no women as editors, no women as executive editors, no women as managing or assistant managing editors, no women as editorial chiefs and no women in other directing editorships.¹⁹

Since Journey's studies, the Newspaper Association of America has researched the number of women in newspaper management. For example, an estimated 30 percent of newspaper managers in 1992 were women,²⁰ a figure which rose to an estimated 32 percent in 1995.²¹

Despite the burst of research about woman managers during the 1980s, little scholarship has been conducted about women managers before the 1980s. This study will examine women in newspaper management from 1949 to 1979. This period was selected because it begins shortly after the end of World War II and continues until similar research by Journey in the late 1970s. Research questions are:

1. What was the trend in number of women who were publishers and/or editors at U.S. daily newspapers between 1949 and 1979?

2. What was the trend in the number of women holding other newsroom management positions at U.S. daily newspapers between 1949 and 1979?

3. Were U.S. daily newspapers with women editors and/or publishers more likely to have women in other newsroom management positions between 1949 and 1979?

4. What organizational and environmental factors were related to hiring women for U.S. daily newspaper second- and third-level management positions between 1949 and 1979?

Each of these questions will be answered by examining women in newspaper management at 10-year intervals from 1949 to 1979.

Method

The underlying purposes of the research questions are to estimate the population parameters by inferring from a sample and to investigate possible causes of these parameters with regression analysis. This dual purpose created a sampling problem. A simple random sample would accomplish the first purpose, but a simple random sample would not generate enough cases of women managers to conduct the regression analysis. For example, a simple random sample of 400 would have generated about 28 newspapers in 1949 with women editors and/or publishers. This would provide insufficient variance to conduct an adequate regression analysis.

To solve the problem, stratification was used to over-sample newspapers with women editors and/or publishers. This is a commonly used procedure in polling and census work. The resulting over-sampled stratum was then weighted to reduce its impact on estimating the populations.²²

Managers were identified by using the newspaper listings in editions of *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*.²³ Working backward, the years 1979, 1969, 1959, and 1949 were selected because Journey's studies using this method were conducted annually from 1978 to 1987, after which the same method was continued periodically under the National Federation of Press Women.²⁴ The initial year in this study represents a time when the United States was returning to normalcy after World War II. The study was not extended past 1979 because Journey and others have already summarized these data. The aim was not to replicate existing research but to explore a period that has been neglected by scholars.

Three types of managers were identified at each newspaper: 1) publisher and top editor, 2) second- and

third-level newsroom managers and 3) non-newsroom managers. Second-level managers were managing editors, or equivalent, and their assistants. Third-level managers were desk or department managers (such as city editor, sports editor, fashion editor, book editor, etc.) and assistants. Non-newsroom management positions were all other department management positions listed. These included the circulation, production, advertising and business departments. In addition, third-level positions were divided into those positions traditionally held by women and those not. Positions traditionally held by women included food editor, fashion editor, garden editor, women's page editor and librarian. Non-traditional positions were all others and included city editor, wire editor, and sports editor.

If the name listed in a management position was traditionally a woman's name, this position was coded as belonging to a woman. If the person holding the spot had a traditional man's name, then the position was coded as belonging to a man. If initials or a name that could have been a man's or a woman's (such as "Pat") was listed, the position was coded as being indeterminable. The number of spots that were indeterminable declined across the 30 years.²⁵

The sample of newspapers studied here is a combination of a random sample of one stratum and a census of the other. Of the 1,780 dailies in the 1949 Editor & Publisher International Year Book, 128 had women editors and/or publishers. Instead of randomly sampling from these 128, all of them were included in the study to assure adequate representation for regression analysis. In addition, this stratum would allow the impact of women managers on promoting other women to be studied during the 30-years.

Obviously, these 128 newspapers would not necessarily have women top managers throughout the 30-year study period. It also was likely that other dailies would promote or hire women as top managers. In order to adjust for changes across time, all dailies without women editor and/or publishers in 1949 were classified as the second stratum. A simple random sample of 254 dailies was selected from this group in 1949. The initial total sample of 382 newspapers eventually decreased to 344 as newspapers closed from 1949 to 1979.²⁶

Average circulations for all the newspapers in the study were: 26,954 in 1949, with a range from 850 to 944,133; 30,335 in 1959, with a range from 200 to 883,213; 35,985 in 1969 with a range from 1,287 to 955,915; and 38,402 in 1979, with a range from 1,680 to slightly over a million. Average circulation for all dailies was 29,689 in 1949, 33,219 in 1959, 35,301 in 1969, and 35,294 in 1979. The mean sample circulations were all less than one standard error from the population means reported in *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* for all four years, which indicates that the sample was an acceptable representation of the population.²⁷

Additional data were collected about the newspapers and communities to use as control variables. These variables included total number of newsroom management positions, whether the newsroom

employees were members of the Newspaper Guild, whether the newspaper was located in a competitive market (which was defined as a city with another separately owned and operated daily or a city with a joint operating agreement) whether the newspaper was in an urban or rural setting, whether the newspaper was owned by a group, and the number of women in non-newsroom managerial positions. The circulation, group ownership and competitive market variables were found in various editions of *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*. Identification of Guild membership was based on lists of member newspapers provide by the Newspaper Guild.²⁸ An urban setting was defined as a city located within a Metropolitan Statistical Area. All others were considered rural.²⁹

The first two questions, about numbers of women in management positions overall, were answered with means and standard errors. Because the entire sample was not selected randomly, the figures in Tables 1 and 2 were calculated by using a weighting system.³⁰

The final two questions, about organizational and environmental factors, were answered with least-squares multiple regression analysis. Guild membership, urban-rural environment, competitive situation, group ownership, and whether the editor and/or publisher were women were dummy variables, with the presence of these characteristics indicated by a one and the absence by a zero. The number of non-newsroom managers and the total number of newsroom managers are ratio level measures. Data were checked to determine whether they were consistent with assumptions of regression. Data fit the assumptions with minor modifications.³¹

The research questions concern the population of U.S. dailies. The answers are based on applying appropriate tests of statistical significance at the 95 percent level of probability. In other words, changes and relationships must be greater than would be expected from sampling error.

In an effort to establish the validity of our estimates, the total estimated number of editors in this study was compared to the percentage of directive editors from Journey's studies, which was taken from the *1980 Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*.³² She reported 7.0 percent and this study found 5.8 percent, which was well within the sampling error. Therefore, it appears this sample provides a good estimate of the population, although it might underestimate the percentages slightly.³³

Results

1. What was the trend in the number of women who were publishers and/or editors at daily newspapers between 1949 and 1979?

The data in Table 1 show a gradual increase in women editors and publishers from 7.2 percent in 1949

to 11.6 percent in 1959 and 13.3 percent in 1969. In 1979, the percentage dropped to 10.4 percent. The increase from 1949 to 1959 was not great enough to rule out sampling error as the cause. However, the difference between 1949 and 1969 was statistically significant at the $P < .01$ level. The decline from 1969 to 1979 was not statistically significant, so it should be interpreted as a leveling off of the growth trend.

Table 1. Number of Women Who Served as Publisher and/or Editor at Daily Newspapers between 1949 and 1979

	Publisher		Editor		Both		Total	
	1949 Ed/Pub	Sample	1949	1949 Ed/Pub	Sample	1949	1949 Ed/Pub	Sample
1949	81 (4.5%)	NA (1.9%)	34 (0.7%)	NA (7.2%)	13	NA	128	NA
1959	58 (8.2%)	86 (3.5%)	15 (0.4%)	46 (11.6%)	8	0	71	132
1969	27 (6.7%)	90 (6.0%)	8 (1.1%)	90 (13.3%)	7	13	42	193
1979	10 (4.6%)	71 (4.8%)	6 (1.0%)	79 (10.4%)	3	15	19	165

Note: The 1949 ed/pub column refers to the dailies that had a woman editor, publisher or both in 1949. All dailies were examined during this year. The sample refers to the other 252 dailies that were randomly selected in 1949 from the dailies that had no woman in one of the top management positions and followed through the next 30 years. The standard error for these figures is plus or minus 2.5%, which when applied to a confidence interval at the 95% level of probability, means the actual number of dailies with women in these top managerial spots could have been as many as 82. The estimated percentages of all dailies that had women in these positions are given in parentheses. The actual population percentages would have been this percentage plus or minus 5% at the 95% level of probability.

Similar patterns were found when trends for dailies with women editors and publishers were examined separately. The decade of fastest growth for women publishers was from 1949 to 1959, when the percentage of dailies with women publishers went from 4.5 to 8.2 percent. The decade of fastest growth for women editors was from 1959 to 1969, when the percentage of dailies with women top editors went from 3.5 to 6 percent. By 1979, the percentage of dailies with women publishers was about equal to the number of dailies with women editors.

2. What was the trend in the number of women holding other newsroom management positions at U.S. daily newspapers between 1949 and 1979?

Three measures of women in newsroom management are shown in Table 2. The average number of women who held newsroom management positions in 1949 was .874. This increased to 2.046 by 1979. The increases from 1949 to 1959 and 1959 to 1969 were statistically significant ($p < .05$), but the increase from 1969 to 1979 was not.

Table 2. Average Number of Women in News/Editorial Management Positions at Daily Newspapers 1949 and 1979

	All Women Newsroom Managers	Women in Non-traditional Management Positions	Number of Management Positions	Percent of Management Positions Held by Women
1949 N=382	.874 (.027)	.097 (.016)	3.468 (.109)	25%
1959 N=370	1.524** (.082)	.359** (.038)	5.638** (.316)	27%
1969 N=356	1.872* (.125)	.593* (.050)	7.388* (.528)	25%
1979 N=344	2.046 (.137)	.975* (.070)	7.514 (.535)	27%

The figures in parentheses are the standard error of the mean.

* T-test comparing this year with the previous one showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < .01$ level.

** T-test comparing this year with the previous one showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < .001$ level.

Showing a similar pattern, the number of women who held newsroom management positions not traditionally filled by women increased steadily from .097 in 1949 to .975 in 1979. All increases from one decade to the next were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. The increase from 1969 to 1979 was important because it occurred while the total number of management positions and women in all newsroom management positions remained stable.

The growth pattern of women in management positions not traditionally held by women indicates the percentage of all second- and third-level women managers who were in non-traditional newsroom management positions grew from 11 percent in 1949, to 24 percent in 1959, to 32 percent in 1959, to 48 percent in 1979.

A final measure used to evaluate the trend was the percentage of all newsroom management positions held by women, which is the far right column in Table 2. This percentage remained remarkably similar throughout the 30-year period. In 1949, women held 25 percent of the newsroom management positions, which increased to 27 percent in 1959, dropped to 25 percent in 1969, and returned to 27 percent in 1979.

3. Were U.S. daily newspapers with women editors and/or publishers more likely to have women in other newsroom management positions between 1949 and 1979?

The general answer is no, with a minor reservation. Table 3 shows regression analysis for all women newsroom managers and Table 4 shows regression analysis for women holding management positions not traditionally held by women. In two of the eight regression equations, having women in top management positions was related positively to having more women in newsroom management. In 1949, having a woman editor or woman publisher resulted in more women holding second- and third-level management positions. In 1969, having a woman at the top resulted in more women filling newsroom management positions that were not filled traditionally by women.

Table 3. Regressions for the Impact of a Woman Publisher or Editor on the Number of Women Managers in the Newsroom, Controlling for Other Variables

(Beta Weights)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable			
	1949 Women Managers	1959 Women Managers	1969 Women Managers	1979 Women Managers
Publisher/editor is a woman	.097 ^a	.005	.015	.034
Number of women managers in other dept.	.118 ^b	.048	.041	.169
Competitive market	-.144 ^b	.024	-.115 ^a	-.088 ^a
Group owned	-.051	.003	-.051	.002
Union shop	-.002	-.166 ^c	-.007	-.050
Urban market	.008	.008	-.015	.009
Number of news/ed management spots	.630 ^c	.787 ^c	.863 ^c	.837 ^c
Adjusted R-square	.339 ^c	.581 ^c	.634 ^c	.622 ^c
N	371	360	346	335

[a] $p < .05$, [b] $p < .01$, [c] $p < .001$

Table 4. Impact of a Woman Publisher/Editor on the Number of Women with Non-Traditional Newsroom Management Positions, Controlling for Other Variables

(Beta Weights)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable			
	1949 Women Managers	1959 Women Managers	1969 Women Managers	1979 Women Managers

Publisher/editor is a woman	.033	.034	.104 ^a	.014
Number of women managers in other dept.	.015	.026	.108 ^a	.048
Competitive market	-.068	-.007	-.111 ^a	-.182 ^c
Group owned	-.054	.006	-.044	.015
Union shop	.024	-.122 ^a	.012	-.027
Urban market	-.036	.041	.019	.001
Number of news/ed management spots	.150 ^b	.559 ^c	.688 ^c	.763 ^c
Adjusted R-square	.003	.291 ^c	.407 ^c	.447 ^c
N	371	360	346	335

[a] $p < .05$, [b] $p < .01$, [c] $p < .001$

In both cases, however, the relationship was minor. The level of statistical significance was $p < .05$, and the amount of total variance uniquely accounted for by having a woman editor or publisher was only about 1 percent.³⁴

4. What organizational and environmental factors were related to hiring women for newspaper second- and third-level management positions between 1949 and 1979?

Environmental and organizational factors played a large role in explaining the number of women in all newsroom management positions, and to a lesser degree in the non-traditional newsroom management positions, based on the equations in Tables 3 and 4. The regression equations explained from 34 to 63 percent of the total variance in second- and third-level newsroom management positions. For women in non-traditional management positions, the equation in 1949 accounted for less than 1 percent of variance. This increased to 29 percent in 1959, about 41 percent in 1969 and about 45 percent in 1979. All equations were statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level, except the 1949 equation for women in non-traditional management positions.

The most important independent variable in all of the regression equations was the number of newsroom management positions. This variable uniquely accounted for 31 to 50 percent of the variance in women holding second- and third-level newsroom management positions, and from 21 to 32 percent of the variance in women holding non-traditional newsroom management positions. Most of the increase in the positions held by women was a result of the growing number of newsroom managers.

The second most important variable was the presence of competition. In five of the seven statistically significant regression equations, being in a competitive market was negatively related to having women in newsroom management positions. In 1949, 1969 and 1979, the number of women in second- and third-level positions was lower in competitive markets. In 1959 and 1969, the number of women holding non-traditional management positions was lower in competitive markets. The impact was not great, but it was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or better. The total amount of variance uniquely accounted for by competitive markets was between 1 and 2 percent in all five equations.

No other variables were as consistent in having a statistically significant impact across time. However, the equations for three years raise some interesting questions.

In 1959, having a union shop was related negatively to the number of women in second- and third-level management positions and to the number of women in non-traditional management positions. Union representation at newspapers accounted for a little less than 2.4 percent of the variance in all the management positions and slightly more than 1 percent in the non-traditional positions. This unusual impact is even more intriguing because the percentage of newspapers with Guild members never exceeded 7 percent in any of the years.

Both 1949 and 1969 are interesting for a similar reason. In these years, the number of women in non-newsroom management positions was related positively to the number of women in other newsroom management positions. In both years, the impact was small, explaining only about 1 percent of the variance each year.

Discussion

The overall trend of women in newspaper newsroom management was one of slow but steady growth during the 1950s and 1960s, with stagnation in the 1970s. The two-decade growth was prompted primarily by the doubling of managerial positions in the newsroom, a trend that leveled off in the 1970s. The importance of expanding management positions is revealed by the stable percentage of newsroom management positions held by women. The percentage was either 25 or 27 percent in all four years measured. The increasing absolute numbers did not translate into an increase in proportion of positions held by women. This was consistent with the overall workforce, which saw the percentage of management positions held by women reach 28 percent in 1978.³⁵

The final decade in this study showed a slowing in the growth of women in newsroom management in two of three areas: the number of women in the top editor or publisher position, and the total number of women in other newsroom management positions. The one area of continued growth was for women in non-traditional management roles in the newsroom. The percentage of all women newsroom managers

who held these positions increased from only 11 percent in 1949 to 48 percent in 1979, with its largest growth between 1969 and 1979. However, this increase came as the number of women declined who filled management positions traditionally held by women.

Perhaps the remarkable thing about these data is that the stagnation of the earlier growth trend came as the women's movement was strengthening. Women were forming groups around issues such as trade unionism and office work. Between 1967 and 1974, the National Organization of Women (NOW) went from 14 to 700 chapters, from 1,000 to 40,000 members.³⁶ Strides were made in the legal arena. Lawsuits based on sex discrimination were being filed in the 1970s and won. Some of these involved *Newsday*, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Detroit News*, the Associated Press, NBC and Metromedia.³⁷

Since the late 1970s, the percentage of newspaper managers who are women has lagged behind the percentage for all occupations. In 1991, the general workforce percentage of managers who were women reached 40.6 percent.³⁸ The corresponding figure for newspaper managers who were women was only 30 percent in 1992.³⁹

The stagnation in women newspaper managers also occurred as the number of women newspaper employees was increasing. The percentage of female newspaper employees increased from 26 percent in 1970 to 37 percent in 1980.⁴⁰ In addition, the percentage of newsroom employees who were women increased from 22.4 percent in 1970 to 34.4 percent in 1982.⁴¹

A possible explanation for the slowdown, suggested by Faludi in her book *Backlash*, is that this forced entry into a male-dominated environment was met with great resistance. She found that the advancement of women in business has been a series of growth periods followed by backlash from men toward the growth. She said the late 1970s was such a period, which could explain the decline in female top managers during the 1970s.⁴²

Of course, an important factor in limiting women in newspaper management throughout this period was the bias against women holding these positions. Bias may include the opinion that women cannot do an adequate job or the assumption that women do not want the job.⁴³ In addition, the perception still exists that women work to purchase luxuries rather than to support families and thus are not serious about their careers.⁴⁴ This bias is part of the variance not explained by these equations.

Whatever the cause for the stunted growth of the 1970s, the industry returned to a growth pattern during the 1980s. Using *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*, Journey found that 13 percent of the dailies had women as directing editors in 1987. An industrywide survey in 1995 found that 32 percent of executives and managers in daily newspapers were women.⁴⁵ This reflects the newspaper industry's

more recent efforts to promote diversity and serve the variety of readers in the market.

Also of interest in this study was the failure to find a consistent pattern of women in top managerial positions hiring women to fill more newsroom management positions. This sort of behavior was found to a minor degree in two years, but overall, women were not necessarily promoting other women. This could be a result of several factors, but two stand out. First, it is likely that most newspaper corporations were owned or run by men during this period. Therefore, a women publisher might be limited in power by the bias in these corporations. Second, it may be a result of organization culture. It is difficult for one or two women, even when at the top position, to counteract a male-dominated culture. In such situations, absolute numbers become important in building political power bases.

Even though leaders of the newspaper industry say they are committed to developing women as managers, the degree of commitment remains questionable. The latest figures from 1995 indicate that the number of women in managerial positions has increased to 32 percent. However, this is only five percentage points above the 27 percent figure found here for women managers in 1959, an increase barely above the sampling error for the 1995 study. The percentage of all newspaper employees who are women increased from 37 percent in 1980⁴⁶ to 41 percent in 1995.⁴⁷

This study raises interesting questions that suggest the need for additional research about this period of transition. Was the 1979 drop in percentage of newspaper management positions held by women managers caused by the backlash suggested by Faludi? Why was competition negatively correlated with representation of women in management? Why was guild membership at a newspaper negatively related to representation of women in management? How strong is the industry commitment to developing women managers and women as employees when the figures seem to increase so slowly?

About the Authors:

Lacy is professor and Davenport is associate professor in the Michigan State University School of Journalism. Miller is associate professor of business at the University of Notre Dame. An earlier version of this manuscript was presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, August 1993.